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# HEGEL IN THE ARAB WORLD

Modernity,  
Colonialism,  
and Freedom

**Lorella Ventura**



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Modernity, Colonialism, and Freedom

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## FOREWORD

The study presented here is inscribed in the broader frame of the studies about the relations between the Western world and the “Orient” and the Islamic world in the Modern era, focusing on the transmission of ideas and the elaboration of reciprocal images, and highlighting their influence on the self-representation of “Eastern” and Middle Eastern peoples, as well as on the Western world’s awareness of its own identity. On one hand, the Eastern—and Middle Eastern—world was influenced by colonialism in relation to the representation of its role in history, and referred to a model of progress and development, which was centered on the Western idea of “modernity.” On the other hand, in the West, the experiences and the increasing knowledge of the “Orient” in general and of the Islamic world in the Modern era, not only contributed to the revision of the medieval prejudices and to the construction of views which dealt more accurately with historical and philological data, but they also allowed the elaboration of a concept of “European modernity,” which in many cases is constructed through oppositions to the “Oriental”—or more generally non-European—“other.”

This complex historical-cultural problem is the background to the research conducted by Lorella Ventura, which aims to present a survey of the reception of Hegelian thought in the Arab world. This is a task for which Lorella Ventura is particularly suited, because of her solid knowledge of Hegelian thought, and because she has recently conducted an analytical study about Hegel’s view of Islam and of Arab thought.

In the first part of the book Lorella Ventura reconstructs the positions on Islam and on the history of relations with the Islamic world of Hegel and of the culture of his time, and identifies some of the fundamental themes of the debate on “Orientalism” and on the relation between Islam and Western culture. Subsequently, she dedicates a long chapter to the study of the passage of ideas from the Western world to the Arab world in the nineteenth century, to verify the presence of concepts or themes which can be traced back to Hegel’s thought. Particularly interesting are the chapters dedicated to the Syrian Protestant College (the current American University of Beirut) and to the American Protestant missionaries who were active in Ottoman Syria, a territory that today corresponds to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine. This aspect of the research entails the confrontation with the knot represented by the relationship between religion and politics, and between religion and “modernity,” with very interesting and (in many aspects) innovative results, from the point of view of the history of the reception of Hegel’s thought and that of the cultural history of the Arab world and its interactions with Western thought. The highlighting of the link between Hegel’s ideas and those of the Protestant missionaries of the Syrian Protestant College is an element of great interest, which can shed light on the possibility of an indirect reception. In fact, a thin conceptual thread can be defined, which links Hegel’s thought and that of the American Protestant missionaries gathered around the Syrian Protestant College, and which can be traced back to the re-elaboration of some Hegelian themes and concepts by American Protestant theologians and thinkers, such as Josiah Strong. In particular, it is about the idea of a progressive development in history, as well as of the relationship between modern rationality and religion.

In addition, the presence of Hegelian ideas in that cultural milieu is suggested by the survey of the textbooks adopted by the Syrian Protestant College, which are, at least in part, in tune with Hegel’s idea of world history. These ideas coexist with those linked to the French Enlightenment, represented in Beirut by the Université Saint-Joseph. The comparison between the political, cultural, and religious setting of the two universities shows that they held and actively disseminated two different visions, and this highlights that the “West” did not appear in the Arab world as a uniform and monolithic entity.

Also of considerable interest is the research that concerns the contemporary reception of Hegel, based on research conducted in Syria

and Lebanon, and on interviews with key exponents of Middle Eastern culture, which shed light on the current stance on Hegel's thought and on present Arab philosophical culture in general. Moreover, research in libraries, surveys of the works, and interviews, help contextualize the various kinds of reception, and refer them to the recent history of the various countries. Hegel was introduced to the countries of the area mainly through the Marxism of the 1960s and 1970s and is read through its parameters. The peculiarity highlighted by Lorella Ventura is the fact that in Lebanon and Egypt, Hegel's reception has distanced from this first interpretation, which is Marxist (Soviet and French), while in Syria the situation is different and the link with a Marxist perspective is still tight. Hegel, in fact, is still predominantly the philosopher of dialectics and of "freedom." In this sense, Hegel's positions on the Eastern world and on the Arabs do not negatively affect the judgments on his philosophy and do not preclude the possibility for some of his concepts to be recovered and reworked.

In conclusion, Lorella Ventura's research on the contemporary reception of Hegel, as well as opening a very interesting perspective for the studies on Hegelian thought, contributes to illuminating Arab culture and its history, which may be useful to understanding some cultural dynamics that are the basis of current conflicts and difficulties in communication and mutual understanding.

Naples, Italy  
September 2013

Giuseppe Cantillo

## PREFACE

This work is the translation, with some modifications and adapted to the different format, of the book *Modernità, colonialismo, libertà: Hegel nel mondo arabo*, published in Italian in 2013 (Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia). This expands the general lines of the research I conducted for my Ph.D., “Civilization, Cultures and Societies of Asia and Africa—Curriculum: Islamic Civilization: History and Philology,” about the “Influence and Reception of Hegel’s Thought in the Arab World (Syria, Lebanon, Egypt)” (in Italian), which was financed by the University of Rome “Sapienza,” and discussed at the University of Rome “Sapienza” Italian Institute of Oriental Studies on June 28, 2012. In comparison to the dissertation, this book represents a deepening of the main aspects and a stricter systematization of the many themes, information, and reflections, in order to be more accessible to the reader. In the present translation I have further systematized and revised the text and made it lighter for reading, and I have reduced some discussions and quotations. Moreover, I have mainly cited English translations (when available), and I have reduced references to German, French, and Italian works, which are possibly not as well-known to the English-speaking reader. For the interested reader, a comprehensive bibliography (including Italian, German, and French works) can be found in the Italian version of the book.

An essential background of this research is a thorough study I have pursued on Hegel’s view of Islam, in which I have taken into consideration the context of Hegel’s time, his sources, and the information available to him, as well as his statements and texts. After a survey of



the view of Islam and Muslim peoples in Hegel's time (and before), I have carefully considered Hegel's texts and I have used the most recent editions to highlight some changes in Hegel's stance toward "Islam" in general as well as toward the single Muslim peoples (in some cases also in their pre-Islamic period). This is a long and complex study, entailing the survey of many texts and the discussion of Hegel's statements about Islam (in particular in his *Lectures*) in the light of his philosophical ideas in general. The detailed discussion and the reflections I have developed about the topic, with a thorough bibliography, can be found in the book *Hegel e l'Islam* (2013, Pomigliano d'Arco: Diogene), in Italian, as well as in various articles both in Italian and English on single aspects. Here I can only briefly mention some of its main results (mainly in the brief preliminary survey in the first part), because the present research has a different focus, namely the reception of Hegel's ideas, for which it is not essential to concentrate on what Hegel had "really" said (also in the light of the most recent edition of his works), but on the works, ideas, and concepts that were widespread and best-known.

Unless otherwise specified, translations of the conversations, titles, and names from Arabic are my responsibility. Some explanation is necessary about the transcription system I have adopted. Because this book is not meant solely for specialists of Arabic language and the Arab world, for transcriptions from Arabic I will follow an extremely simplified criterion. I will not use diacritical marks, but I will preserve 'ayn and hamza (but not initial hamza). The feminine nisba will be rendered -iya. Ta marbuta will be written a/at. The defined article will be indicated with al- and written in lowercase, if it is not the first word of a sentence. In the case of names already transliterated I will follow the previous/common use. For names in European languages I will use the European transcription; for example, I will write Hegel instead of Hījil/Hīghil (the first is more common in Egyptian texts) and Hegeliya instead of Hījiliya/Hīghiliya.

A general terminological premise may be useful to avoid misunderstandings and confusion. "Islam" refers to a religion, a civilization (what Hegel also calls "Mohammedanism," with a dated term), and a territory corresponding to the Muslim-majority countries. "Arab" is referring to a people, a nationality, sharing the same language, and it does not imply any link to a given religion (such as Islam or Christianity). The Arab world and Islamic (or Muslim) world are not synonymous, and "Arab" is not the same as "Muslim," although in some Arab

countries there is sometimes the tendency to identify them as such. Not only must the pre-Islamic period be taken into account, but also today there are many Arabs who are not Muslims. The “East”/“Orient” (or the Eastern/Oriental world) may include both the Islamic and Arab world, but also includes many countries, such as China, which are not “Islamic” (from the point of view of the religious majority and from the cultural-historical point of view) and not “Arab.” As I am going to show, Hegel tends to consider Islam and the proper “Eastern”/“Oriental” world mainly separately. In the text, however, in some cases I will use the terms “Orient”/“East” and “Oriental”/“Eastern” in relation to the “Orientalist” view, a “Western” construction of the “East,” so that in some cases “Oriental” corresponds to “non-Western.” I will use the terms in quotation marks, when it is important to highlight this background and meaning.

There are many people and institutions who I would like to thank for their help with my research and its publication, and I regret that here I am forced to choose only some of them. I am grateful to the late Mario Signore for having accepted my research in the series directed by him for the Italian publisher Pensa MultiMedia Editore. In the field of philosophy, I express my deepest gratitude to Giuseppe Cantillo, who generously guided and supported my research. I would also like to thank Paolo Vinci, for his important suggestions. Also, I want to dedicate an affectionate remembrance to the late Francesco Valentini, to whom I owe my philosophical formation and my first encounter with the philosophy of Hegel. In the field of Islamic Studies, my gratitude goes to the faculty and professors of the Ph.D. course in “Civilization, Cultures and Society of Asia and Africa—Islamic Civilization: History and Philology” of the University of Rome “Sapienza,” especially to Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti and Leonardo Capezzone, for their trust in the potential of my research and their valuable advice.

My deeply grateful thoughts go to all the people who have made this work possible in Syria and Lebanon with their kind helpfulness. I am thinking of the institutions where I have conducted my research, especially the University of Damascus (Department of Philosophy, Library of Higher Studies of the Faculty of Humanities, and Library of the Faculty of Humanities), the “al-Asad” National Library, the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) in Damascus, and the American University of Beirut. I heartily thank all the scholars and professors who agreed to talk to me about the subject of my research and thus contributed to its

success, even when—for space requirements—I cannot always dedicate to their contributions the space they deserve. In particular I thank Yūsuf Salāma, Ahmad Barqāwī, and George Saddiqnī, who I met in Damascus; Josef Ma‘alūf, who I met in Beirut. A grateful thought goes to the late Nadrah al-Yāzajī, for his help and profound kindness. I am deeply grateful to Safuh Murtada for his fundamental help and support—in this and many other occasions.

Last but not least, I thank my family, and all the friends who have been close to me during my work on this subject. A special thank also to Alif for the interesting discussions on the history of Syria and the Middle East, and for his constant and patient support.

Rome, Italy

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

**Abstract** A description of the aims, methodological approach, and limits (conceptual and geographical) of the book, and its structure. It clarifies the expression “Arab world” and the choice of a particular area within it. It explains that the book is divided into three parts, each requiring a different approach. The first deals with Hegel’s philosophy and his ideas on history; the second considers the (indirect) reception of his thought in nineteenth-century Ottoman Syria; the third deals with the contemporary reception in Syria, Lebanon, and partly Egypt, through bibliographical research and interviews with some important representatives of the cultural world in the area.

**Keywords** Hegel · Reception · Orientalism · Arab world

The question of the relations and mutual cultural influences between the West and the Muslim world focuses the attention of many contemporary scholars. This issue is important and delicate particularly in relation to current cultural and postcolonial studies and to studies on “Orientalism,” aimed at determining the influence of some Western representations on the approach to non-Western peoples, on the self-representation of these peoples, and on the definition of their historical identity.

In this book, we shall be dealing in particular with the Arab world and the West. For this reason, I will refer both to the more general

framework of studies of “Orientalism” and colonialism, and, because of the tight link between the Arab world and Islam, to studies about the relationship between Islam and the West. This focus on the Arab world means that we shall not be considering Iran or any of the many other non-Arab Muslim countries.<sup>1</sup>

The Arab world is an area where the problem of self-representation and historical identity is felt most deeply. Because of recent political events it has become a matter of urgency to consider the contacts that this area has had with Western countries during the era of their full “modern” development, when they were eager to expand their sphere of influence and their conquests to the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The focus of such studies is not to highlight what is supposed to properly and originally belong to the “Arab identity,” as if referring to an abstract idea of purity. On the contrary, on the premise that cultures and thoughts intertwine and are not isolated, these studies can contribute to the reconstruction of the history of the Arab world’s culture in the modern and contemporary era (or, more precisely, of defined areas and countries included in the very general definition of “Arab world”), by helping identify the various contributions to this culture, and their different sources. From this perspective, the very idea of “influence” must not be understood in a deterministic way or as the result of some imposition, but as an appropriation of concepts, which implies an autonomous choice, in this case on the part of the Arab intellectuals.

This study, which focuses on the thought of Hegel, is set in this frame and its purpose can be seen from two different perspectives. On one hand, it aims to shed light on the reception of Hegel’s thought and its interactions with the culture of countries that are generally considered “other” to the Western world. On the other hand, it transcends the perspective of studies on the reception of Hegel’s thought, and connects to the recent cultural and political debates. A better knowledge of the history of Arab culture may help in understanding recent events and conflicts and their actual dynamics, by seeing them in the context of the historical and cultural specificity of the Arab and Muslim world in general, as well as of the single countries which are part of it. In addition, a better understanding of the relationship between the Arab and Western worlds can help mutual understanding, by avoiding generalizations and essentialization.

<sup>1</sup>On Iran see, among others, Hofmann (2014) and Boroujerdi (1994).

It is important to note that the definition “Arab world” is very broad and general, encompassing many geographically, historically, and culturally different and distant countries (despite their linguistic unity), which, especially in the last two centuries, have not shared the same historical experiences. In this work, I chose to focus on Syria and Lebanon, and, to a lesser extent, Egypt. Syria and Lebanon can be considered representative as one of the cultural, and partly also political, “centers” of the Arab world, and present some homogeneity from the historical and cultural point of view (although with many differences). One important example of this role is the birth of Arab nationalism. Egypt represents a different area, but with many contacts and cultural exchanges with Syria and Lebanon, and with a role in the reception of Hegel which has become noticeable in recent years. The Maghreb is of course another important “center,” with a different history. In particular, its longer colonial history has exerted great influence from the linguistic and cultural point of view. Research on the reception and influence of Hegel’s thought in the Maghreb would therefore require a different method and approach (for example, the importance of translations would be minimal), and in most cases, it would need to be framed and interpreted in light of the debate within French philosophical, cultural, and political life. I am also not taking into consideration the states of the Arab Peninsula, which, although interesting from the viewpoint of their cultural features, are not central in relation to this study. Given the general premise however, it must be noted that in some cases it will be necessary to refer to thinkers and works belonging to different geographical areas. In fact, the linguistic unity of the Arab world allows books and ideas to circulate easily, and it is very difficult, and inadvisable, to mark rigid borders.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of this work is dedicated to the careful consideration of the positions and concepts that Hegel (1770–1831) expressed in his *Lectures* both on history in general and in particular on the Orient, Islam, and the Muslim peoples. His positions are examined in the overall context of his thought and also in relation to the culture of his time, so that their peculiarities can be highlighted. This brief preliminary survey

<sup>2</sup>The Arabic-speaking countries are characterized by a situation of *diglossia*. Modern Standard Arabic tends to be understood by everyone and is the written and literary language, spoken in formal situations and in the media. Dialects (spoken forms of the Arabic language) have developed in the single countries and areas, and sometimes differ greatly from each other.



aims to establish a frame of reference, from which it will be possible to discuss the various positions and concepts which I will deal with in the course of this work. For this reason, I also briefly mention the basic lines of the current debate on “Orientalism” and the role in it of the Hegelian consideration of the East and Islam.

In the second part I consider the reception of Hegel in nineteenth-century Egypt and “Syria” (Ottoman Syria).<sup>3</sup> For this period, it is difficult to speak of direct reception, because there are no translations, citations, or explicit references to Hegel and his work. However, it is possible to speak with sufficient certainty of an indirect reception and influence. This idea is a result of the consideration of the work, the cultural background, and the educational policy of the two foreign universities founded in Beirut in the second half of the nineteenth century, namely the American *Syrian Protestant College* (now the *American University of Beirut*) and the French *Université Saint-Joseph*, which formed a bridge between Western thought (American-Protestant and French-Catholic-Jesuit, respectively) and the thought of the Arab elite. Thanks to this privileged position, they played an important role in the formation of Arab anti-Ottoman and more specifically nationalist thought. They had different importance and transmitted different views, even in relation to the very idea of “modernity.” Through this analysis it can be shown that the position of the Protestant missionaries of the Syrian Protestant College in some respects was close to that of Hegel and that they may have had a role in transmitting ideas which can be traced back to his thought. The role of the Université Saint-Joseph appears not to be meaningful for the influence of Hegel’s thought, because it appears to be in general more distant from Hegelian views, representing as it does values—Catholic, French, and “revolutionary”—that Hegel only partly shared.

The third part of the book is devoted to the contemporary reception of Hegel in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Through interviews with some important representatives of the academic and cultural world, it shows that today in the Arab world Hegel’s thought is known and studied, in some cases subjected to criticism, and in others appreciated for its libertarian and critical power. Many of the works of Hegel have been

<sup>3</sup>“Syria” in the nineteenth century referred to the area which includes the Ottoman provinces of Damascus, Aleppo, and Sidon, which correspond to the area of modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, and Jordan.

translated into Arabic. The area including Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt has produced (and still produces) almost all of the translations of the works of Hegel, as well as some of the critical literature on his thought. The protagonists of this reception are mostly secular intellectuals, mainly, but not exclusively, in the universities. This consideration shows that, despite the linguistic unity which allows the circulation of knowledge in the Arab world, the reception of Hegel differs as a consequence of political and cultural situation of individual nation states. Particularly interesting is the case of Syria, which is still influenced by Marxism and by a “socialist” view, where Hegel is mostly seen as a philosopher of dialectic and freedom, closely linked to Marx, and his positions on the Eastern world in general and on Islam has not played a determining role in the reception of his thought. In contrast, in Egypt, which today is the center of translating activity, Hegel tends to be seen from a viewpoint which is more linked to international debate (in particular about “Orientalism”), so that he appears to be an authoritative representative of a kind of Western thought (and world) with which Egyptian intellectuals aim to confront and engage in dialogue.

Finally, I need to underline that this research cannot be, and it is not meant to be, an exhaustive consideration of the topic, but it is first steps on a new path, which I hope will be an encouragement for new research, on this or similar topics, and an incentive for discussion, so that it can contribute to the development of this field of study.

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PART I

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Hegel, the East and the Question  
of “Modernity”



## CHAPTER 2

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# Widespread Views in Hegel's Time

**Abstract** This chapter aims to point out and briefly discuss (also by referring to the current debate) some key-concepts of the Western views of the East and of Islam, which were widespread in Hegel's period, such as "exoticism;" the "sensuality" of paradise; the condition of Muslim women; fanaticism and tolerance; and the idea of the "Oriental despotism." In the eighteenth century, especially with the Enlightenment, a new view of Islam began to develop, which distanced itself from medieval prejudice; at the same time, the colonial enterprise in the Muslim world was about to start.

**Keywords** Hegel · Islam · European view of Islam · Enlightenment Colonialism · Orientalism

The question of Hegel's influence and reception in the Arab world can be approached from two different, although complementary, perspectives. On one side, the influence of Hegelian thinking in general can be investigated, with its conceptual structures, categories, and way of interpreting facts; on the other, attention can be focused on Hegel's view of the Arab world, Islam, and the Muslim world (and even of the non-Western world in general). This aspect of Hegel's thought is part of the more general framework of Western views of Islam; for this reason, in the following pages I will briefly consider some fundamental features of this view in Hegel's period.

One main characteristics of the period is what Schwab ([1950] 1984) called the “Oriental Renaissance,” with the arrival of Sanskrit texts in Europe, which gave the study and knowledge of the East a great impulse, and can be considered complementary to the arrival of Greek texts that played a great part in initiating of the first Renaissance in the fifteenth century. The translation of the *Avesta* from Persian by Anquetil-Duperron (1771) can be considered a starting point of this process, and of a new perception of the “Orient” in general (including Muslim countries), as well as a new interest in its history and culture. New narrations of the historical course were developed, according to which the Jewish people were no longer considered the starting point of history, contradicting the Biblical narration, and their role in history started to be reconsidered and resized (as for example in Voltaire’s *Essai* [1756] 1963). In the background, the political, military, and ideological advance of colonialism was in its infancy, and was beginning to influence the perception of the “East” in general, including the Islamic East.

Edward Said, in *Orientalism* ([1978] 2003), identifies in colonialism a moment of radical change with respect to the previous cultural situation.<sup>1</sup> This is exemplified by the wide spread of “exoticism,” which is characterized by attraction, but also by the affirmation of an insurmountable difference, and it paradoxically begins with an increase in contacts and knowledge. For this reason, it seems to have an ideological function rather than being a response to an objective situation, mainly to highlight a strong division between “us” and “them” that would in fact enable the regime based on “two weights and two measures” which is necessary for colonialism (Daniel 1966, pp. 480–481).

The idea of a profound unsurpassed difference distinguishes what Maxime Rodinson calls the “unconscious” Eurocentrism of the eighteenth century from the “conscious” one of the nineteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, an unconscious sense of Eurocentrism was present but it was guided by the universalist ideology of the Enlightenment and therefore respected non-European civilizations and peoples. With good reason it discovered universal human traits in their historical

<sup>1</sup>“Orientalism” means a vision of the Orient characterized by eurocentrism and tendency to generalization and essentialism, which arose and established itself with colonialism (and later imperialism) and is functional to it. Said’s theory had much success as well as many critics, and is still being debated.

development and their contemporary social structures. But with a kind of pre-critical naïveté, eighteenth-century scholars attributed to these civilizations the same underlying bases as European civilization. Any cultural specificity was only superficially recognized. The conscious and intellectually-developed Eurocentrism erred in the opposite direction. An irreducible specificity was assumed at all possible levels; universal motivations and traits were denied or belittled. If there was to be any universality at all, it would have to be based entirely on the European model. (Rodinson 2002, p. 65)

According to Rodinson, this view was accepted by some Easterners themselves, “by adopting the European model, starting with its most superficial aspects”; others, however, “totally rejected it and continued to adhere to the most archaic values of their own culture” (p. 65), sometimes reacting violently.

In the eighteenth century there was no general agreement on the images of Islam, which suggests that there was a form of openness and an acceptance that knowledge was still in formation, which in fact was a distancing, sometimes with difficulty, from the influence of medieval prejudice.<sup>2</sup> Some ideas, though, that had originated from the widespread prejudices of the Middle Ages retained their role in modern era, with various modifications: even now they still retain great power. According to Norman Daniel (1966, p. 6 ff.), the main themes on which the criticisms of Islam in the Middle Ages focused, namely violence, lasciviousness, and imposture, are still the same today, with only slight modifications, because they concern the central interests of man's life.

One influential view of the Muslim world in the eighteenth century is to be found in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* ([1721] 2008), focusing on the sensual aspect and on woman's condition, reflecting and at the same time promoting an image of great sensuality. This image is also due to the success and diffusion of the translation of *The Thousand and One Nights* (initially translated into French by Antoine Galland [1704–1708], and immediately afterwards translated into other European languages), and especially by travel narrative. Montesquieu himself makes extensive use of travel literature, for example in *The Spirit of Laws* ([1748] 1773, I, p. 357),

<sup>2</sup>For some additional considerations on the views of the East and Islam in modern Europe, see also, among others: Osterhammel (1998), Djait (1978), Hentsch (1988), Hazard (2013), Hourani (1991), Stroumsa (2010), in particular pp. 124–144.

he—also referring explicitly to the work of Jean Chardin (1686)—again speaks about women and harem: in “Mahometan states,” he observes, “not only the life and goods of female-slaves, but also what is called their virtue or honor, are at their master’s disposal.”

Kant ([1764] 2011, p. 60) also speaks about these issues and affirms that in the Orient a woman “is always in prison, whether she be a maiden or has a barbaric, inept, and always suspicious husband.” According to Kant, moreover, the European man is the only who “found the secret of decorating the sensuous charm of a powerful inclination with so many flowers and interweaving it with so much that is moral,” unlike the inhabitant of the Orient, who “has no conception of the morally beautiful that can be combined with this drive, he also loses even the value of the sensuous gratification, and his harem is a constant source of unrest for him” (p. 60). These views are also influenced by the image of the “sensual” paradise promised by Islam, which was often pressed into use as an explanation for the expansion of the Muslim religion.

The image of the Muslim world in the eighteenth century was linked to the ideas of tolerance and fanaticism. Islam had long been the exemplar of fanaticism, yet this image was beginning to be questioned. Not only did travel literature report several examples of great tolerance in the Muslim empires (see Minuti 2006), but the very structure of Muslim religion appeared to be more suitable for tolerant attitudes. In the milieu of the Enlightenment, which vigorously pointed out the relationship between religion, superstition, and obscurantism, there were admirers of the Muslim religion and its “simplicity” as well as its tolerance. In some cases, reference to Islam was a means to develop criticisms which were totally internal to the Christian world and its divisions.<sup>3</sup> Voltaire in his *Essai* ([1756] 1963, I, p. 275), observes that Islam is an indulgent and tolerant religion, in contrast to Christianity, which, contrary to the teaching of Christ, is intolerant and barbarous. In order to underline the intolerance of Christians, he also emphasizes that the Turks permit the Greeks to have their churches, while no Christian nation would tolerate a mosque (see p. 823).<sup>4</sup> In general, it can be observed that the supporters of deism and “rational” religion were favorably disposed toward Islam.

<sup>3</sup>This is probably the case also of Voltaire’s *Fanaticism* ([1741] 2013).

<sup>4</sup>These remarks are taken from a revised text (Voltaire made revisions in 1761, 1769, 1775, and immediately before his death), which is included in the posthumous “Kehl” edition (1785). On Voltaire’s view of Islam see Badir (1974).

In addition, the idea of Muhammad as a great politician who used religion for his political goals was in tune with general views about religion.

A concept often associated with Islam is that of "Oriental despotism," which was born in Greece and was further defined during the European Enlightenment. It speaks of the uncontrolled power of an agrarian empire, mainly located in Asia, governed by an administrative elite and supported by slave labor, anticipating what in Marxism will become the "Asiatic mode of production" (see Harlow and Carter 1999, p. 24). Montesquieu, in *The Spirit of Laws*, considers the Ottoman Empire an example of "Oriental despotism" and, although by so doing he attracts the criticisms of Voltaire ([1756] 1963) among philosophers and Anquetil-Duperron (1778) among Orientalists, both of whom denied that such despotism was a feature of Muslim empires in general, his characterization had great success (see Venturi 1963).

Hegel was not interested in the debate on the characterization of Muhammad, and he also manifests no interest in the condition of women. He does emphasize the idea of sensuality, and of the "sensual Paradise" in his very brief remarks about the Ottoman empire and in connection with the idea of its decadence (see Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 377), although it is possible to find an indirect connection to "sensuality" when he speaks about the love and fervor of Muslim individuals, reflected in their culture's poetry (p. 375). On Oriental despotism, he, referring in particular to the people of Western Asia, states that "every Mohammedan is free" and that "despotism in the strict meaning of the word does not exist among them" (Hegel [1845] 1971, p. 44, § 393 Zusatz), referring in particular to the destruction of the caste system in India. The widespread idea of Islamic fanaticism in Hegel's view becomes a purifying and "progressive" force. He defines it as "enthusiasm for something abstract" ([1840] 2001, p. 375), referring to his view of the Muslim God as the abstract One, and affirms that "Never has enthusiasm, as such, performed greater deeds" (p. 376). These observations reflect the characteristic of the Hegelian approach to the phenomenon of Islam as a whole, which is based both on information and views that "circulated" in his time in cultured environments, and on their re-elaboration in the light of his philosophical vision.

Hegel certainly studied and read, in order to get information about the Oriental world in general, past and present. Among the authors and works which have contributed to creating a certain "atmosphere" and general knowledge of Islam and of Muslim peoples and regions



(including the Ancient and pre-Islamic periods), and may be counted among Hegel's sources (although it is not easy to determine his sources, because he rarely mentions them openly<sup>5</sup>), Herder's *Ideen* (1784–1791) and Voltaire's *Essai* ([1756] 1963) are very important as examples of a new approach to the philosophy of history, as well as for their characterization of Islam and Muslim peoples, and for their information. An account of history is also provided by Edward Gibbon (1776–1789). Reports and updated information were provided by Joseph von Hammer's journal *Fundgruben des Orients* (1809–1818). The same author published several works about politics and history (such as on the constitution of the Ottoman empire [1815–1816] and on the history of the Assassins [1818b]), as well as translations and literary works, such as the translation of the *Divan* of Hāfez (1812–1813) and a collection of Persian poems (1818a). Hegel also refers to his translation of the *Šīrat 'Antar*, which he considers the “Epos der Mohammedaner” (Hegel 2004, p. 206), although its final version was published posthumously (in French) (1868). William Jones' journal *Asiatic Researches* (1806–1812) was very important for Hegel's study of the Orient; also very important are Jones' translation of the pre-Islamic Arabic poems *al-Mu 'allaqāt* (1782); Joseph Görres' translation of the Firdusi's *Shahnameh* (1820),<sup>6</sup> and Friedrich Rückert's translations of Rūmī's poetry (1821) and of the *Maqāmāt* of al-Harīrī (1826). A very particular view on Islam and Islamic culture, and especially Persian poetry, is provided for Hegel by Goethe's *Divan* (1819), which Hegel openly admires (Goethe also speaks of national characters before Islam). In addition, travel reports and work of the geographers were very important sources.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>A useful tool for deepening this aspect is the list of books he possessed at the time of his death (see *Verzeichniß* 1832).

<sup>6</sup>Hegel refers to it in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ([1840] 2001, p. 200), as an epic having as its subject “the old heroic traditions of Iran,” and that, however, “it has not the value of a historical authority, since its contents are poetical and its author a Mahometan.”

<sup>7</sup>For more information about Oriental studies and translations, and the approach to Islam and Islamic culture, in particular in Germany, see: Mangold (2004), Remy (1901), Fück (1955), Stemmrich-Kohler (1983), Almond (2010), Mommsen (1988).

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## CHAPTER 3

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# World History and the Role of Peoples

**Abstract** This chapter considers Hegel's view of world history and of the role the Oriental world played in it, in particular in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ([1840] 2001), where Hegel describes a “progressive” movement in which protagonists are peoples and especially states. For Hegel, the course of history shows a progressive development of the consciousness of freedom starting from the East, the beginning of proper history, and ending in the German world, which (thanks to Christian religion) is characterized by the consciousness that man, as man, is free. Africa is excluded from the course of history, and America is a probable protagonist of future history, about which however, philosophy cannot yet say anything.

**Keywords** Hegel · Philosophy of history · World history  
Oriental world · East · Freedom

In order to have a complete picture, it is important to consider Hegel's view of world history and what role the Oriental world plays in it.<sup>1</sup> In *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ([1840] 2001) Hegel describes a “progressive” movement in which protagonists are peoples and,

<sup>1</sup>For the consideration of Hegel's view of the East see Schulin (1958), Hulin (1979), Bonsiepen (1981), among others. See also Jaeschke (1994), for Hegel's view of the history of religions.

especially, states. “Progress” is progress in the consciousness of freedom, which is the aim of the historical course and finds its realization in his own era. The modern world, in fact, which has been formed after the French revolution and after Kant and German Idealism, has reached “absolute knowing,” its transparent self-comprehension, and it is characterized by a new relationship between the individual and the community, which is based on the centrality of freedom. Spiritual life and political life, morality, and ethics are closely linked in Hegel’s historical-dialectical thinking. When Hegel speaks of the state, it often does not refer to the pure form of state organization, but to all that characterizes the life of a people, such as customs, ethical attitude, culture, and art. All these aspects are held together and reflected on each other, being part of an “organic” unity. The “Spirit” of a people is the self-conscious unity (the totality) of these different aspects, and this self-consciousness is expressed in cultural forms, albeit with a different degree of “transparency”: as art is the most linked to senses, religion does not overcome representation, while philosophy is the most transparent to itself. The difference between them is only in this stronger or weaker link with still-sensitive and representative aspects, but all three forms have to do with truth, its awareness, and its expression.

The truth-reality is a determined articulated totality, in which the activity of the individual subject is accompanied by his need to recognize that what is realized is his reality and realization, and—consequently—the place of his freedom. This aim is achieved in the modern state.

The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth. We have in it, therefore, the object of History in a more definite shape than before; that in which Freedom obtains objectivity, and lives in the enjoyment of this objectivity. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 54)

The philosophy of history is in this sense a “theodicy,” which shows the development of “reason” (God, the Good) in history. It is fundamental that the individual recognizes himself in the reality, but it is also important that s/he does not look for what ought to be (the *Sollen*) in it, but s/he is able to look at what it is. Historical facts are not to be considered in the light of moral judgments or individual desires, but from a “higher” point of view, which can see beyond the easy recognition of the presence of evil and injustice, in order to be able to grasp the rationality of what is realized: its sense. It is not a question of distinguishing good and bad, of reading

history through the lens of moral criteria, but explaining and understanding the events from the point of view of the whole. Writing on the course described in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel remarks:

We have confined ourselves to the consideration of that progress of the Idea [which has led to this consummation], and have been obliged to forego the pleasure of giving a detailed picture of the prosperity, the periods of glory that have distinguished the career of peoples, the beauty and grandeur of the character of individuals, and the interest attaching to their fate in weal or woe. Philosophy concerns itself only with the glory of the Idea mirroring itself in the History of the World. Philosophy escapes from the weary strife of passions that agitate the surface of society into the calm region of contemplation; that which interests it is the recognition of the process of development which the Idea has passed through in realizing itself — *i.e.*, the Idea of Freedom, whose reality is the consciousness of Freedom and nothing short of it. That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is this process of development and the realization of Spirit — this is the true *Theodicaea*, the justification of God in History. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 477)

Hegel's position does not necessarily mean that he sees history moved by preordained necessity, as some or many of his statements may indicate (with the well-known formula “the cunning of reason”, or “destiny”), but, rather, that a sense, a reason for events can be traced in it.

Not all that has happened in the past pertains to “history”. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel indicates the essential conditions for events to acquire historical significance. Fundamental is the presence of a state organization, because it is essential that there is a purpose, a universal principle in which a given people can recognize itself.

In fact it [a people] is world-historical only in so far as a *universal principle* has lain in its fundamental element — in its grand aim: only so far is the work which such a spirit produces, a moral, political organization. If it be mere desires that impel nations to activity, such deeds pass over without leaving a trace; or their traces are only ruin and destruction. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 92)

At the basis of the sedentarization of the nomads and of the creation in the East of the first state organizations, which marks the beginning of history, there is a change in the “spiritual” attitude: the consciousness

of the substance takes the place of the arbitrariness of the individual, and in this way the state acquires individuality. A universal principle, a conscious and self-conscious unity, takes the place of dispersion in singularity and naturalness. In this way, an “intelligent reminiscence” also emerges, “Mnemosyne” (p. 78), a conscious historical narration of events, a consequence of the first fundamental step, of the elevation from single to universal. According to these assumptions, Hegel affirms that the periods that have passed nations before they have begun to write history, no matter how rich in events, “are on that very account destitute of *objective* history, because they present no *subjective* history, no annals” (p. 77). In this sense, for Hegel Africa “is no historical part of the world” (p. 117), and its inhabitants are characterized by the “want of self-control” and their condition “is capable of no development or culture” (p. 116). Similarly, India is not entirely capable of history, because it is dominated by “distinctions derived from nature” (castes) and by “wild arbitrariness,” “without any goal of advancement or development” (p. 78).

When considering the course of history, Hegel shows that every people is focused on a spiritual principle, and the progress of world history depends on the fact that in each period a given people represents the “highest” spiritual principle and tries to realize it. “A Nation is moral — virtuous — vigorous — while it is engaged in realizing its grand objects, and defends its work against external violence during the process of giving to its purposes an objective existence” (p. 91).

When the spiritual principle that animates a certain people is realized, “the activity displayed by the Spirit of the people in question is no longer needed” (p. 91) and that people are not important anymore for the progress of world history. This is similar to the individual’s passage “from maturity to the old age” (p. 91), during which s/he enjoys the fruits of what s/he has reached. In this way, a people can lead a “mere *customary life*,” which “brings on natural death,” as without opposition and interest, it leads “a merely external sensuous existence which has ceased to throw itself enthusiastically into its object” (p. 91). Both individuals and peoples can perish this way, and although a people can still formally exist, it leads “an existence without intellect or vitality,” which means “a political nullity and tedium” (p. 92). Yet Hegel points out that a nation cannot die a simple natural death, because it is not a mere individual, but a spiritual life; so it embraces a new purpose, it reaches “a higher, more comprehensive conception of itself” (p. 92), which means a new national Spirit. A people “can die a violent death,” but only “when it



has become naturally dead in itself” (p. 92). Moreover, the spirit of a people is an objective spiritual reality, and even if the people “die” politically, the spiritual principle it has realized cannot perish and—as it is “a National Spirit belonging to Universal History” (p. 92)—it is transmitted and re-elaborated, as a part of the progressive knowing and expressing itself of the “all-pervading Spirit” (p. 92).

We have already discussed the final aim of this progression. The principles of the successive phases of Spirit that animate the Nations in a necessitated gradation, are themselves only steps in the development of the one universal Spirit, which through them elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending *totality*. (Hegel [1840] 2001, pp. 95–96)

When Hegel deals with geographic and climatic factors, which are at the basis of history and of the consideration of history, he argues that the very hot and very cold areas are excluded from the course of history because there man is too oppressed by climatic factors to develop a free spirit. On the other hand, climatic factors are not to be understood in too deterministic a way. In fact, universal and single, spiritual and natural are in a dynamic (dialectical) relationship of mutual determination.

Nature should not be rated too high nor too low: the mild Ionic sky certainly contributed much to the charm of the Homeric poems, yet this alone can produce no Homers. Nor in fact does it continue to produce them; under Turkish government no bards have arisen. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 97)

The path of world history also excludes Africa and the “new world”. “Proper” Africa, that which lies south of the desert of Sahara, in particular is “shut-up,” “isolated,” “compressed within itself” because of its geographical condition, and is wild, “enveloped in the dark mantle of the Night” (p. 109). America, a still largely immature country, is for Hegel “the land of the future” (p. 104).

Hegel distinguishes three types of geographical elements, namely arid elevated land, valley plains, and coastal region, to which he links the historical-spiritual situation of the various peoples (p. 105). The first element, the arid elevated land, with its extensive steppes and plains, is mainly inhabited by nomads, for example Mongolians and Arabs. They are characterized by the patriarchal system, live by animal breeding, and

there are no legal relations among them. It often happens that “they cohere together in great masses” and “rush as a devastating inundation over civilized lands” provoking only “destruction and desolation” (p. 106). The second element is that of the valleys permeated by rivers, which were formed by large streams to which they owe their fertility, where the primary principle of subsistence is agriculture. Here the foundation of great states begins, the great centers of civilization: China, India, Babylonia, and Egypt. The third element is the coastal land, which is characterized by connection and communication: “nothing *unites* so much as water” (p. 107). Moreover, the sea permits man to go beyond his “infinite multitude of dependencies” and “limited circles of thought and action” (p. 108). The “stretching out of the sea beyond the limitations of the land” is what is missing in “the splendid political edifices of Asiatic States, although they themselves border on the sea — as for example, China” (p. 108). What matters in Europe is precisely the relationship with the sea, that outward trend that is lacking in Asian life. “The sea gives us the idea of the indefinite, the unlimited, and infinite; and in *feeling his own infinite* in that Infinite, man is stimulated and emboldened to stretch beyond the limited” (p. 108).

The course of universal history “exhibits the *gradation* in the development of that principle whose substantial *purport* is the consciousness of Freedom” (p. 72). It begins when, for the first time, the existence of something substantial is recognized and develops in successive moments, depending on the different role the individual assumes in relation to the substantial. It is in the East that for the first time the conscience of something substantial rises: “The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning” (p. 121). The history of the world has an East par excellence. “Here rises the outward physical Sun, and in the West it sinks down: here consentaneously rises the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance” (p. 121). Asia is the Orient. Hegel recognizes that it is “indeed a Western world for America,” yet “as Europe presents on the whole, the center and end of the old world, and is absolutely the *West* — so Asia is absolutely the *East*” (p. 117). It is “the region of origination,” where “arose the Light of Spirit, and therefore the history of the World” (p. 117).

The point is that here rises the consciousness of the substance, which is not accompanied by the emergence of an equally important role for the individual. The substantial and individual in the East are still separated, with the first dominating the second. In fact, the true individual

principle will only arise in the Greek world. In the East, which is “the childhood of History,” “substantial forms constitute the gorgeous edifices of Oriental *Empires* in which we find all rational ordinances and arrangements, but in such a way, that individuals remain as mere accidents” (pp. 122–123). The meaning of the individual principle and of the conciliation that is sought between it and the substance is that what is good, right, *in* itself must be also *for* itself, for the conscience of the individual. The Spirit has “to make itself *actually* that which it is *potentially*” (p. 31), to get to the knowledge of what it is, and universal history is “the exhibition of Spirit in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially” (p. 31).

The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that Spirit — Man *as such* — is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. They only know that *one is free*. But on this very account, the freedom of that one is only caprice; ferocity — brutal recklessness of passion, or a mildness and tameness of the desires, which is itself only an accident of Nature — mere caprice like the former. — That *one* is therefore only a Despot; not a *free man*. The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that *some* are free — not man as such. [...] The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness that man, as man, is free: that it is the *freedom* of Spirit which constitutes its essence. (Hegel [1840] 2001, pp. 31–32)

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Hegel's View of Islam

**Abstract** This chapter addresses Hegel's view of Islam, as it appears from his lectures of the Berlin period, when he started to be most interested in the Oriental and extra-European worlds in general. Because Hegel's lectures address different subjects (history, religion, aesthetics, philosophy), all of them need to be taken into consideration, in order to outline his view, which is complex and multifaceted.

**Keywords** Hegel · Islam · Hegel's *lectures* · Fanaticism · Arabs  
Arab philosophy · Persian poetry · Pantheism

When considering Hegel's view of Islam, it must first be observed that, for him, Islam is not properly part of the "Oriental world." His "Oriental world" includes China, India, Ancient Persia, Syria, and the Semitic Western Asia, Judaea, and Egypt,<sup>1</sup> while the discussion of the Islamic world is included in the part devoted to the "Germanic world," the fourth phase of the course of World history, where the conciliation between essence and subjectivity is realized.

Within this stage, and at the beginning of it, Hegel deals with "Mohametanism." The consideration of the Germanic world begins "with the Reconciliation presented in Christianity" (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 127),

<sup>1</sup>Here I am referring to the book's division into parts (Hegel [1840] 2001). The succession of the historical peoples varies in the different editions and courses.

between the Universal and the Individual, “but only in the germ, without national or political development” (p. 127). The Spirit is only abstract, not yet realized, so that what is secular is left to itself, it is “given over to rudeness and capricious violence” (p. 127). The interpenetration of the “divine” element with reality, which characterizes Christian religion, is not understood fully; therefore this phase is to be regarded as “commencing rather with the enormous contrast between the spiritual, religious principle, and the barbarian Real World” (p. 127). This is important because the “Mohammedan principle,” which Hegel here calls “the enlightenment [*Verklärung*]<sup>2</sup> of the Oriental World,” is for him “the first to contravene this barbarism and caprice” and it develops itself “later and more rapidly than Christianity; for the latter needed eight centuries to grow up into a political form” (p. 127). The scheme is simple and in a certain sense “typical” of Hegel: an abstract principle corresponds to a reality which is left outside, namely not rationalized. Only later, in the later Christian-Germanic world, is the principle of the Spirit articulated concretely and the reconciliation between the spiritual and secular realized, which is lacking both in the first configurations of the Christian and Muslim worlds.

When dealing with Hegel’s consideration of Islam, the very form of his texts can cause some difficulties. Because Hegel’s interest in the non-Western world increased considerably in his Berlin period, it is necessary to focus mainly on the lectures he held in Berlin, which, as is well known, were not written by Hegel himself, but were mostly reconstructed by collecting listeners’ transcripts.<sup>3</sup> At first, they were arranged according to a criterion which privileged the unity of the overall discourse, underestimating the diachronic element. This “classic” editing method, adopted since the first publication of the *Werke* (Hegel [1832–1845] 1970) just after Hegel’s death, has only been discussed in recent decades by scholars gathering around the Bochum Hegel-Archiv, following the publication of the lectures separately. This type of material is

<sup>2</sup>The German word *Verklärung* (see Hegel [1840] 1970, p. 140) can be better translated as “transfiguration” or “elevation.”

<sup>3</sup>Courses on the philosophy of history were held by Hegel in Berlin during the winter semesters 1822–1823, 1824–1825, 1826–1827, 1828–1829, and 1830–1831; on the history of philosophy at Jena (1805–1806), Heidelberg (1816–1817 and 1817–1818), and Berlin (1819, 1820–1821, 1823–1824, 1825–1826, 1827–1828, 1829–30, 1831–1832); on the philosophy of religion during the summer semesters 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831; on Aesthetics at Heidelberg in 1818 and in Berlin in 1820–1821, 1823, 1826, and 1828–1829.

particularly valuable for those who are concerned not only with Islam, but also with the East and the extra-European world in general, since Hegel devoted particular attention in his Berlin years to the study of these countries, with a progressive enrichment of his knowledge that involved changes in his general perspective.<sup>4</sup> It is important to bear in mind, however, that in this study I will refer mainly to the *Werke* edition, which has been the best-known and generally widespread version of the *Lectures*. In this general outline, I will only briefly add considerations and remarks referring to the most recent edition in order to give an idea of the complexity of the topic. In fact, the aim of this consideration of Hegel's work is not to address his ideas and system in general, but only to point out some of the main ideas and views which may be significant for the present study and can serve as guidelines and references for it. A more detailed analysis and a strong emphasis on the discussion on what he "really" said or meant would be less useful in the light of the research about Hegel's reception.<sup>5</sup>

In his Berlin lectures, the aspects of Islam that he highlighted or neglected change according to the subject of each course, so that the final image is not simple, but needs to be reconstructed in its complexity, by putting the various aspects together. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, as noted above, Islam is not properly part of the Oriental world (although we find the expression "Mahometan East") (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 376). Islam is the "Revolution of the East, which destroyed all particularity and dependence, and perfectly cleared up and purified the soul and disposition; making the abstract One the absolute object of attention and devotion, and to the same extent, pure subjective consciousness — the Knowledge of this One alone — the only aim of reality" (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 372). Here he emphasizes the revolutionary and egalitarian trait of Islam. The widespread idea of Muslim "fanaticism" is connected to the idea of Muslim God as "abstract One," which is indeed underlined by Hegel though also interpreted in a "progressive" sense.

<sup>4</sup>Even among those who have focused on Hegel's ethnocentrism, there are scholars who have been able to appreciate his ductility and intellectual curiosity, for example Wilhelm Halbfass (1988, pp. 84–99).

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed discussion of the topic, see Ventura (2013), on which this consideration is based. See also, among others: Schulin (1958), Hulin (1979), Maila (1982), Olivier (2008), Ayada (2010), Almond (2010), Gethmann-Siefert and Stemmerich-Kohler (1986), Bonsiepen (1981), Kwon (1992).

It is interesting to note that Hegel compares it with the French revolution and the Terror, which for him was an important achievement of the “Spirit” and a turning point of its development (p. 375).<sup>6</sup>

Hegel speaks of the “abstract One” in comparison to Christianity, in which God is thought of as concrete, determined. In the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* ([1845] 1971), he clearly affirms that, first of all, Muslim religion overcomes the “limited principles of the Jews,” as it is “expanded into universality” (p. 44, § 393 Zusatz). In addition, it has a destructive effect, as seen above, in respect of the Asiatic religion, because for Islam “God is no longer, as with the Asiatics, contemplated as existent in immediately sensuous mode, but is apprehended as the one infinite sublime Power beyond all the multiplicity of the world” (p. 44, § 393 Zusatz). Moreover, “The Christian God is not merely the differenceless One, but the triune God who contains difference within himself, who has become man and who reveals himself” (pp. 44–45, § 393 Zusatz).

From a strictly historical viewpoint, Hegel in the *Philosophy of History* refers mainly to the beginning of Islam, the Arab Caliphate, Al-Andalus, and the Ottoman empire. The information he provides is generic and meagre, such as the brief description of the conquests and the one of the cultural flourishing of the caliphate, especially in the Abbasid period, yet in many cases he gives them a peculiar direction and meaning. So that, as an example, the rapidity of the conquest and of cultural development on one hand and of decadence on the other, is connected to the Muslim idea of God. In fact, saying that God is an “abstract” means that nothing finite can be compared to God and this—as with what Hegel says about the French Revolution—causes an incessant mutability which makes it impossible for Islamic kingdoms and empires to have a stable organization.

On this boundless sea there is a continual onward movement; nothing abides firm. Whatever curls up into a form remains all the while transparent, and in that very instant glides away. Those dynasties were destitute of the bond of an organic firmness: the kingdoms, therefore, did nothing but degenerate; the individuals that composed them simply vanished. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 375)

<sup>6</sup>It can be noted that in the most recent edition of the course of 1822–1823 (Hegel 2001, p. 474 ff.), this important aspect is not emphasized by Hegel.

The information about the main aspects of Muslim religion is based on a substantially exact knowledge, which, however, does not appear to be thorough, or based even on a partial knowledge of the Koran. It is important to note that when he mentions the “pillars” of Islam, he does not include the pilgrimage (*hajj*), and he cites the *jihad*, meant as proper war, namely “to die for the Faith” (p. 374), as the most important. Moreover, he points out the fact that Muhammad is only a man: “Mahomet is a prophet but still man—not elevated above human weaknesses” (p. 373). This shows Hegel’s emphasis on the rigorous interpretation of the concept of the uniqueness of God.

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Islam is not included in the consideration of the historical religions. Hegel refers to Islam in some of his remarks about Jewish religion where he points out that Islam is more universal, because it is not limited to a single people (as he does also in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, see Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 373). In the most recent edition, in the course of the year 1824 (in the part dedicated to the Christian religion, as “Consummate religion”), there is a longer consideration of Islam, which is not present in the other courses or in the *Werke* edition. He affirms that Islam is in the same “sphere” as Christian religion, which in it “finds its antithesis” (Hegel 1998, pp. 242–243). Hegel uses the term *Gegensatz* (see Hegel 1993–1995, III, p. 172), which can be also translated as “opposition” and has a “technical” meaning, which in the light of Hegel’s dialectic view suggests complementarity more than mutual exclusion.<sup>7</sup> He also compares Islam with the religion of Understanding, and deism, which Hegel sees as the abstract religion of the *Être suprême*, in comparison with which Islam is more advanced from the point of view of the consideration of the absolute, although it is still lacking from the point of view of the individual’s freedom.

This consideration seems an attempt (which in fact does not recur) not so much of systematization as of understanding of a very complex phenomenon. It can be argued that it is the centrality of the idea of God (or the finite–infinite relationship) in the philosophical

<sup>7</sup>The opposition is one of the determinations of the Reflection and means that two elements are only apparently excluding one another, but in fact, according to a dialectic consideration, they are deeply connected and refer both to a “totality,” of which they are articulations (see Hegel [1845] 1991, pp. 184–192, § 119, 120).



consideration of Hegel, which creates difficulties in the overall Hegelian approach to the phenomenon of Islam, which is ambiguous. In fact, the same phenomenon includes the uniqueness of God and “fanaticism,” but also “pantheism,” in which Hegel sees a very different representation of the relationship between finite and infinite, although this is “Islamic” too.

Hegel found one example of Muslim pantheism in Rūmī’s poetry; it is dealt with at the end of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* ([1845] 1971), where he describes its peculiarities. Hegel affirms that to “see the consciousness of the One [...] in its finest purity and sublimity, we must consult the Mohammedans” (p. 308, § 573). He thinks that:

in the excellent Jeleleddin-Rumi in particular, we find the unity of the soul with the One set forth, and that unity described as love, this spiritual unity is an exaltation above the finite and vulgar, a transfiguration of the natural and the spiritual, in which the externalism and transitoriness of immediate nature, and of empirical secular spirit, is discarded and absorbed. (p. 308, § 573)

It is important to note that some views were also linked to and influenced by the “national character” of the single Muslim peoples, and the characteristics of the regions they inhabit. In this respect the idea of the abstract One is connected to the Arabs and their deserts: “The Mahometan religion originated among the Arabs. Here Spirit exists in its simplest form, and the sense of the Formless has its especial abode; for in their deserts nothing can be brought into a firm consistent shape” (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 374). Not only does Hegel deal with the regions and the civilizations of the ancient Near and Middle East, such as the Phoenicians, Jews, and Persians, but—especially through literary works and poetry—he was interested in modern Muslim peoples taken individually, also in the pre-Islamic era.

In his lectures on *Aesthetics*, where these distinctions are more present, Islam is represented by Arab and Persian poetry, and Turkish art in general is neglected (this may be attributed to a lack of translations and information on the topic). The view of the Arabs is bound to the pre-Islamic as well Islamic period, and points out their generosity, nobleness, desire for revenge, courage, and bravery (*Tapferkeit*). This is already apparent in the course of 1820–1821:

Die Araber nämlich in ihren großen Wüsten lebend, und nur der Himmel über sich habend, sind äußerlich und innerlich nur an sich gewiesen, an ihren persönlichen Muth und Tapferkeit, an ihre Subjektivität. (Hegel 1995, p. 140)<sup>8</sup>

In general, Hegel emphasizes Arabs' individual "independence," in particular in pre-Islamic poetry; in fact "the heroes of the older Arabic poetry" appear "not bound to any order settled once and for all, not as mere tiny constituents of such an order [...]" and even the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi provides us with similar characters. In the Christian west, feudalism and chivalry are the basis for free groups of heroes and self-reliant individuals" (Hegel [1835] 1975, I, p. 186). In the transcriptions of the course of 1826 there are references to the *Tapferkeit* of the Arabs, connected to the *Ṣīrat 'Antar* (see Hegel 2005, p. 232; 2004, pp. 206–207). Here Hegel (or the listener) seems to be confused in the periodization between 'Antar as the pre-Islamic hero and the *Ṣīrat 'Antar*, which in fact is a narration of his adventures most probably of the Islamic period, and also affirms, about the romance, that "[er ist] noch nicht so vom arabischen Fanatismus ergriffen" (Hegel 2004, p. 207).

Hegel admires Persian poetry,<sup>9</sup> which, as seen above, represents one kind of "pantheism." In fact, when comparing it to the Indian pantheism, he affirms that "oriental Pantheism has been developed in Mohammedanism, especially by the Persians [...] in a higher and more subjectively free way" (Hegel [1835] 1975, I, p. 368).

In spite of these remarks it must be observed that Hegel does not trace explicit and systematic divisions within "Islam" as a whole, and the differences he outlines between Islamic peoples are not always clear and well-defined. Although they partly differ according to their different history, territories, languages, cultural expressions, and national character in general, in their being "Muslim" they appear as different expressions of the same historical, cultural, political, and religious phenomenon. In fact, Hegel maintains the centrality of God, the universality, as the main feature of Islam and the key concept to try to understand all its

<sup>8</sup>These are very common views of the period.

<sup>9</sup>The most recent edition of the lectures on Aesthetics offers the possibility of distinguishing different stages in Hegel's interest in Islam, so it is possible to observe that in the courses of 1820–1821 and 1823 (Hegel 1995, 2014) the focus on Persian poetry has yet to appear.

concrete manifestations. Moreover, Hegel's distinctions between the different Muslim peoples and the accentuation of some of their characteristics, starting from the pre-Islamic phase, as well as the geographical—territorial distinctions, do not lead to the distinction between Sunni and Shiite Islam, which Hegel never takes into consideration, in addition to not explicitly considering Sufism.

From this point of view, it may be considered that in Hegel's period the news from the Islamic world was dominated by accounts of the Wahhabi movement in the Arabian Peninsula attacking the Ottoman Empire in the name of a more rigorous interpretation of the uniqueness of God.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, this rigorous position was in contrast with other aspects of Islam, such as the relationship between man and God that emerged from Persian poetry, appreciated by Hegel, and perhaps also with the descriptions of concrete life in the Ottoman Empire. These contrasting aspects, which are related to the key concept of the relation between God and the finite, as well as the need for more information and data, can at least partly explain the lack of the consideration of Islam in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.<sup>11</sup>

The *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* deserve a particular consideration. In this field there was a long tradition of knowledge and studies in Europe, in relation to which Hegel seems poorly informed and uninterested. He considers Arabic philosophy (which in fact is Islamic philosophy in the Arabic language) too bound to revelation and theology, and affirms that “according to all that we know of them,” the Arabians “established no principle of self-conscious reason that was truly higher, and thus they brought Philosophy no further” (Hegel [1840] 1963, III, 30). Arabic philosophy is seen by Hegel mainly through the figures of the great “commentators,” to whom he dedicates very few and succinct remarks, and through Maimonides' consideration in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (1629). Hegel points out the “medieval” character of Arabic philosophy, and the link to theology, which makes it very close to Scholastic philosophy; he also makes the point that it is too formal and bound to Aristotelian thought. On the other hand, he sees it as “Oriental” and pantheistic, comparable to the thought of Spinoza, in particular in relation to Maimonides' remarks. It is important to note,

<sup>10</sup>On this aspect see Bonacina (2015), who deals in particular with the interpretations of the new phenomenon of Wahhabism in Europe.

<sup>11</sup>For the discussion of this aspect see Ventura (2014, 2015).

however, that he seems to ignore that Maimonides' account, which he relies on, is not neutral but, rather, a critical exposition. He seems to underestimate or ignore the active role of Maimonides in the dispute between "philosophy" (*falsafa*, which is the Arabic translation of "philosophy," but it indicates only the reflections connected to Platonic–Aristotelian thought) and dialectical theology (*'ilm al-Kalām*, which is in fact another branch of philosophical reflection in Arabic). Maimonides himself (although Jewish) is involved in the dispute and takes part in it on the side of the *falsafa*.<sup>12</sup> This shows that Hegel's view on Arab/Islamic philosophy is deeply distorted by his approach and choice of the sources. Moreover, although he speaks of the "Speakers" or "Medabberim" (Hegel [1840] 1963, III, p. 31—with the term used by Maimonides for the Arab *mutakallimūn*, namely the representatives of *'ilm al-Kalām*), as a "philosophic school or sect" (III, p. 30), his conclusions tends to include Arab philosophy as a whole, which is for him "Oriental," and he affirms "Thus the Arabian developed the sciences and philosophy, without further defining the concrete Idea; their work is rather the dissolution of all that is definite in this substance, with which is associated mere changeableness as the abstract moment of negativity" (III, p. 33—see also 1990, p. 39).

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<sup>12</sup>Moreover, Maimonides' critical exposition addresses mainly the thought of the Ash'arite school, which is only a part of the *'ilm al-Kalām*.

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## The “Modern” West and the Non-Western World

**Abstract** This chapter deals with the question of “modernity,” that arises in this period, in which modern Europe begins to structure its discourse and identity, also by defining its “other,” and the role of Hegel’s philosophy in it. Historicism and world history, the contrast activity–passivity, the idea of “stagnation” and decadence, the relation between the development of history and Christian religion, are the key concepts addressed in this chapter.

**Keywords** Hegel · Modernity · Orientalism · World history  
Historicism · Ottoman empire

The issues discussed in the preceding chapter are connected to the question of “modernity” that arises in this period, in which modern Europe begins to structure its discourse and identity, and begins to define its “other.” From this point of view, Hegel’s philosophy is very important, because it organizes concepts which were already abroad and fixes some fundamental categories through which the discourse of modern Europe about itself is articulated.

At the same time, however, his is an original discourse that reorganizes the material that was at his disposal in a peculiar way. Thus, if, for Hegel, the idea of individual freedom distinguishes a not-free East from a free West, he does not apply this notion to the Muslim world, which is included within the “German world.” Similarly, Hegel sees the

Muslim world characterized by “fanaticism” as much as France during French Revolution, but for him these are “positive” fanaticisms, engines of new and important achievements, because he does not judge history morally.

The point on which Hegel is most critical of the Muslim world is in the opposing of activity and passivity, and his ideas are in tune with the colonial enterprise. Above all, the Turks are passive and lazy, people whose empire only expects to be conquered. In fact, it has lost “fanaticism,” which had led the Arabs to the conquest of the world.

The great empire of the Caliphs did not last long [...] and new kingdoms [were] founded, new dynasties raised to the throne. The Osman race at last succeeded in establishing a firm dominion, by forming for themselves a firm centre in the Janizaries. Fanaticism having cooled down, no moral principle remained in men’s souls. In the struggle with the Saracens, European valor had idealized itself to a fair and noble chivalry. Science and knowledge, especially that of philosophy, came from the Arabs into the West. A noble poetry and free imagination were kindled among the Germans by the East [...] But the East itself, when by degrees enthusiasm had vanished, sank into the grossest vice. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 377)

With the Ottomans, fanaticism has cooled down and left souls without any ethical principle, therefore “as sensual enjoyment was sanctioned in the first form which Mahometan doctrine assumed, and was exhibited as a reward of the faithful in Paradise, it took the place of fanaticism” (p. 377). In this way, they appear to have lost interest and they no longer represent the embodiment of a valid and effective principle which can make them protagonists on the world stage. In the *Aesthetics*, there is a reference to the passivity of the Turks, in the sense of idleness, opposed to the industriousness of Europeans, which is focused on clothing. In fact, the “modern clothes” of the European, “closely fitting,” “follow the outlines of the form,” and do not hinder movement (Hegel [1835] 1975, II, p. 746).

The long wide robes and baggy trousers of the Orientals, on the other hand, would be wholly incompatible with our vivacity and varied activities and they only suit people who, like the Turks, sit all the day long with their legs crossed beneath them or who only walk about slowly and extremely solemnly. (Hegel [1835] 1975, II, p. 746)



When viewed in the light of the colonial enterprise and the slow dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire by the European Powers, Hegel's statements resound darkly; in a sense, Hegel himself, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, implies this line of interpretation.

At present, driven back into its Asiatic and African quarters, and tolerated only in one corner of Europe through the jealousy of Christian Powers, Islam has long vanished from the stage of history at large, and has retreated into Oriental ease and repose. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 377)<sup>1</sup>

Activity is superior to passivity and idleness, movement to stagnation.<sup>2</sup> The close relationship between modernity and activity and the consequent attribution of passivity and inability to act to the "other" is a central point in the discourse of the modern West. This opposition is important not only for the definition of the "other" by the West (in the "Orientalist" style highlighted by Edward Said), but it can play a fundamental role in any distinction between what is "alive" and what is "dead." This corresponds to the distinction between the historical centrality and the "historical death" of a people, also highlighted by Hegel, which marks the great divide between rulers and ruled. For Hegel, the fanaticism of the early Muslims is better than what he characterizes as Ottoman passivity; it marks the difference between an empire which is expanding and one in decay.

Hegel's view of the single historical peoples is part of his general view, on which it is necessary to focus. Hegel sees in history a path with a definite end, namely the freedom of modern man as it is realized by the French Revolution and envisaged by German philosophers, starting from Kant. With respect to this path, there are peoples who have or have not contributed and are more or less at the margins or in the center. It is inside this great narration that the question of "modernity" and historical role of Islam and Islamic peoples is inscribed and finds its definition. More generally, it can be noted that this kind of narration and

<sup>1</sup>See also Voltaire ([1756] 1963, I, p. 838), who affirms that the Ottoman Empire is preserved by the divisions among Christians.

<sup>2</sup>On "stagnation," which is also a key idea in this context, see for example Marx's articles on the British rule in India, where he speaks of the "stagnation" of Indian society as a negative element (for example [1853] n.d., p. 85). On stagnation see also Osterhammel (1998, p. 393).

the perspective of World history (*Weltgeschichte*) in general are strongly criticized, as based on the idea of a linear and progressive movement of history toward perfection, which is to be found in modern West, in particular by those who deal with post-colonial studies and the violence perpetrated on non-Western peoples, motivated and justified by such views.

Edward Said (1985, p. 93), speaks of the “muteness imposed upon the Orient as object” of the Orientalism, so that the Orient was the “silent Other” of Europe and not its interlocutor. Moreover, he points out that when, around the eighteenth century, “the Orient was re-discovered by Europe, its history had been a paradigm of antiquity and originality” (p. 94), and was admired as such, but also considered as a “past.” It represented “primitivity,” “the age-old antetype of Europe,” “a fecund night out of which European rationality developed,” and for this reason “the Orient’s actuality receded inexorably into a kind of paradigmatic fossilization” (p. 94). Said mentions Hegel, among others, in his attack on historicism, considered by him as one of “the legacies of Orientalism, and indeed one of its epistemological foundations,” according to which history “at each given period, epoch, or moment” possesses “a complex, but coherent unity” (p. 101).

So far as Orientalism in particular and the European knowledge of other societies in general have been concerned, historicism meant that the one human history uniting humanity either culminated in or was observed from the vantage point of Europe, or the West. What was neither observed by Europe nor documented by it was therefore “lost” until, at some later date, it too could be incorporated by the new sciences of anthropology, political economics, and linguistics. (Said 1985, p. 101)

Such criticisms are, in a way, applicable in the highest degree to the Hegelian *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. In fact, in some cases, Hegel tends to be considered by studies on the European approach to the “East” as the source of an ethnocentric and “Orientalist” vision, a perfect instrument in the hands of colonialism, especially in relation to the framework and the content of *the Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (see for example Macfie 2000, pp. 13–15). In another sense, however, once Hegel’s assumptions have been specified, by considering Hegel’s works and framing his view of the Orient and of the non-Western world in general in the context of his thought, they are perhaps not so pertinent. The end of history, in fact, is seen by Hegel from a defined point of view and the course of history is reconstructed according to the final

stage, which is represented by a defined political and cultural situation, namely the one of his time. Hegel denies that one can talk about the future, and his own approach prevents essentialization and absolutization of concepts, situations, and values, since the history of the world is characterized by a constant transcendence of existing situations because, at all levels, there is no determinate being that does not follow the "destiny" of the finite, which is change and mutation.

Another very important point, which generally characterizes the dichotomy between modernity and backwardness, can be seen in the role of religion in relation to the state, individual freedom, and rationality. Hegel shares with the Enlightenment a lack of interest in the Middle Ages and a certain rhetoric that opposes the Middle Ages, especially in its religious aspects, and "modern" rationality. He is, however, far from underestimating the importance of religion for man: on the contrary, one of his most important critiques of the Enlightenment is based on it, according to which religion should not be seen solely as superstition nor as an invention of the clergy in order to dominate the people. The people find in religion its deepest self-representation, so religion is the source, the route to find a validation of laws and any reform: "for self-consciousness religion is the 'basis' of moral life and of the state" (Hegel [1845] 1971, p. 284, § 552).

Even states which are based on freedom, are "rational," cannot therefore have any solidity if they are in conflict with religion, which affects the consciences of those who are entrusted with government and administration.

It is nothing but a modern folly to try to alter a corrupt moral organization by altering its political constitution and code of laws without changing the religion – to make a revolution without having made a reformation, to suppose that a political constitution opposed to the old religion could live in peace and harmony with it and its sanctities, and that stability could be procured for the laws by external guarantees. (Hegel [1845] 1971, pp. 287–288, § 552)

This sentence of Hegel's helps to clarify his position not only on religion, but also on revolution. It can be referred partially to Rousseau's idea of "civil religion," but excludes the possibility of a mere artifice, which does not find its root in the deep feelings of a people and in its self-representation. Also on this basis, it is possible to link—as Hegel does—the religions of different

peoples with the idea of freedom that characterizes them. In his discussion of the historical religions Hegel reveals this link and shows that religions that do not conceive God as “Spirit” (in the sense meant by him) correspond to a situation of lack of freedom. In Christian religion individuals have infinite value, unlike Oriental religions, where the principle that man as a man has infinite value is not present. Therefore, it is in Christianity that men are also for the first time personally free. But even within the same Christian religion, where the true content has been attained—the idea of God as Spirit—there can be a situation of lack of freedom. For example, the Catholic religion tends to separate ethics and religion, thus undermining the state’s solidity and the integrity of the individual. In fact, if the state cannot ignore religion, religion cannot keep its space separate from the world and cause a duality in man. This aspect, the unification between the divine and the world, is a very important point emphasized by Hegel. The necessary harmony between religious and ethical consciousness is realized only within the Protestant religion, because in it divine Spirit and worldly life are reunited.

The role attributed to religion by Hegel prevents him from discussing what is generally seen as a contrast between Islam and modernity in the religious field. For Islam, religion does not pertain exclusively to the personal and private sphere. Moreover, he does not accept the deist view of the Enlightenment, which refers to a “great Being” and conceives a “natural” religion, without dogmas and the distinctions between the positive religions.<sup>3</sup> This vision tends to consider Islam as an example of a religion without clergy and dogma, very close to deism and even to the “civil religion” of Rousseau (who, in fact, in the *Social Contract*, takes Muhammad as an example<sup>4</sup>), in its sense of a religion serving the state, a political instrument. For Hegel, as we have seen, religion has a

<sup>3</sup>An example is the famous “Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar” in Rousseau’s *Emile* (Rousseau [1762] 1979, pp. 266–313). He states, for example:

The greatest ideas of the divinity come to us from reason alone. View the spectacle of nature; hear the inner voice. [...] I see that particular dogmas, far from clarifying the notions of the great Being, confuse them; that far from ennobling them, they debase them; that to the inconceivable mysteries surrounding the great Being they add absurd contradictions; that they make man proud, intolerant, and cruel; that, instead of establishing peace on earth, they bring sword and fire to it. (p. 295)

<sup>4</sup>In the *Social Contract*, in the chapter dedicated to “Civil Religion,” Rousseau states that Muhammad’s views were “extremely sound, and his political system closely knit; and while his government kept its original form, under the caliphs who succeeded him, it was wholly united, and in that respect good” (Rousseau [1762] 1994, pp. 160–161).

different meaning and he believes that contents are essential, as well as the legacy of the entire history of Christianity, because he does not give value to the origin, but to the development, believing that truth is the result of movement and change. In general, Hegel criticizes deism and natural religion, showing that Islam has a more “advanced” position in the conception of the relationship between the individual and the absolute. It is the form of religion to “overcome” that kind of philosophy which does not conceive the profound unity between finite and infinite, but separates them, with the result of absolutizing the finite.

Hegel’s position on religion also implies the affirmation of the superior rationality of Christianity and of its closest connection to individual “Western” freedom. Conceived for the first time in Christian religion, the affirmation of individual freedom, in the form of deep and complete interpenetration between finite and absolute (as the absolute itself is thought of as Spirit), is realized in modern Europe. Despite Hegel’s claim that even in the Muslim world of the Near East there is no “despotism,” but there is individual freedom, and despite placing Islam within the “Germanic world” in the *Lectures on the philosophy of history*, he retains firmly the idea of the primacy of Christianity.

Once separated from the context of Hegelian discourse, this idea can reveal dangerous aspects. Rodinson, writing about the changes between the eighteenth and nineteenth century, adds some remarks on the role of Christian religion:

The degraded state of the Muslim world made it an obvious target for Christian missionaries. In keeping with the common beliefs of their time and normal human inclinations, the missionaries credited the triumphs of European nations to Christianity while blaming the misfortunes of the Muslim world on Islam. The perception was that, if Christianity was inherently favorable to progress, then Islam must, by its nature, encourage cultural and developmental stagnation. (Rodinson 2002, p. 66)

Afterwards, the Arabs became “prosperous, cultured, civilized, soft, and feeble, and were subjugated by barbarians” and the division of the “two powers” (161), the theological system and the political system, against which Rousseau raises his criticism, began again.

The consideration of religion, its relation to rationality, and its links with the “Orientalist” and imperialist ideology introduces us to the next part of this work, which concerns the influence of some aspects of Hegel’s thought in Ottoman Syria, transmitted by means of Western missionaries.

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PART II

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The Influence of Hegel's Thought  
in the Nineteenth Century



## Translations and the Transmission of “Modern” Ideas in Muhammad ‘Alī’s Egypt

**Abstract** This chapter deals with the movement of translations in Arabic from European languages and the transmission of “modern” ideas, which started in Muhammad ‘Alī’s Egypt. This brief consideration shows that the movement of translation into Arabic of the Western literary and philosophical texts did not include German philosophy and the work of Hegel. In fact, not only did the reforms and the impulse to Westernization of this period mainly involve the fields of technical-scientific, military, and medical culture, but also the German language was of very limited importance and dissemination, in comparison to French and English.

**Keywords** Translations in Arabic · Western culture · Ottoman empire  
Egypt · Syria

At the end of the eighteenth century cultural exchanges and the transfer of ideas between the Arab and “Western” world began to flow predominantly from the “West” to the “East” and to intensify. Generally, this change and the start of a peculiar kind of modernization in the Arab world are seen as tightly connected to Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798, although this certainly does not mean that there were



not “modern” phenomena before this time.<sup>1</sup> Yet from that moment on, a particular view of history, of the present time, and a type of self-representation developed which originated from the massive contacts and confrontation with the peculiar concept of “modernity,” which was shaped in Europe and is meant to be “Western” and “European.” This concept is not monolithic because Europe was not politically and culturally united. It can be affirmed, however, that one of its main characteristics is opposition to “non-modern,” “backward” peoples and areas of the world (see Said [1978] 2003).

In the period from Napoleon’s expedition to the mid-nineteenth century Egypt was the heart of the translation movement and of the transmission of Western ideas in the Arab world, as well as an important center of power, in competition with the Ottoman Empire. The historian of Arabic literature M.M. Badawi (1993), when dealing with this period as the beginning of modern Arabic literature, speaks of the “fruitful meeting” of Arab tradition with Western culture. A slow process, which began in Egypt and Syria, and then spread to the rest of the Arab world. It is ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Jabārtī who, in his chronicle of the French occupation, describes the effect of the Napoleonic campaign in Egypt, which consisted mainly of highlighting the military superiority and the greater efficiency of Westerners (see Moreh 2004). Consequently, a desire for knowledge developed, especially in the military, technical-scientific, and medical fields, but also in history and literature. Muhammad ‘Alī, who became governor of Egypt between 1805 and 1848, launched a project of total military reform, which was accompanied by a general movement of approach to the West and to its knowledge.

He imported not only Western technicians and military advisors, but also Western forms of education and sent local Arabs on educational missions to the West (mainly to France), to learn the secret of its military supremacy. (Badawi 1993)

In 1816 he introduced a Western-style education system to Egypt, very different from the traditional one. Technological and military schools began to teach the modern sciences and Western languages. The new

<sup>1</sup>Reforms—inspired by the West and particularly France—were implemented in Turkey from the eighteenth century, entailing a translation movement and the printing of books (see Hourani 1983, pp. 41–42).

schools, operating on a “modern” basis, created the need for large amounts of textbooks in Arabic and Turkish for students and teachers, which gave great impulse to the printing of books in Arabic. In 1822 the Būlāq Press was founded:

This Press, later to be known as the Government Press, was to play an important cultural role in the Arab Muslim world: it printed translations of European works, at first scientific and technological, but later on literary translations as well as Arabic classics, which became more widely available than they used to be when they were accessible only in the form of expensive manuscripts copied out by hand. (Badawi 1993, p. 5)

Napoleon brought the first Arabic printing press to Egypt, which he had taken from the Vatican.<sup>2</sup> As Muhammad ‘Alī considered books from Turkey insufficient to fulfill his educational project, he began to collect books to translate and print “with the keenness of a bibliomaniac” (Heyworth-Dunne 1940, p. 328).

He sought books from every possible source from which information and learning could be derived for the enlightenment, education, and guidance of his officials and for the advancement of his many schemes. (Heyworth-Dunne 1940, p. 328)

In his article on translations, Heyworth-Dunne provides an interesting account of the Būlāq printing press, from its foundation in 1822 until 1842, taken from a study by M.A. Perron (1843), to which is attached a detailed catalogue of books, written by T.X. Bianchi (1843).<sup>3</sup> The largest proportion of the collected and translated works is books which serve practical purposes, in the main technical-scientific, military, and medical publications. Despite the dominance of these subjects, a more detailed examination of the list of books reported by Bianchi indicates a by no means negligible number of works on geography, history, and philosophy. Among them are included a history of ancient philosophers translated into Arabic; the first volume of the History of Italy

<sup>2</sup>The printing press had been in operation in Turkey since 1728, and in Syria religious books, which also circulated in Egypt, had been printed for a century.

<sup>3</sup>Bianchi (1843) includes a bibliography: he references news already published by Eichhorn, Hammer and Bianchi himself 25 years before (see pp. 28–29), and integrates it.

(*Storia d'Italia dal 1789 al 1814*) by Botta; an extract of the Memorial of Saint Helena (*Le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*) by Emmanuel de Las Cases translated into Turkish; the *Histoire de Charles XII* by Voltaire translated into Arabic; a history of the Kings of France accompanied by a chronological table of the Muslim world history; the *Histoire de l'impératrice Catherine II de Russie* by Castéra; the Logic (*Logique et principes de grammaire*) by Dumarsais; and among the hundreds of books that according to Bianchi were about to be printed, a translation of the complete works of Montesquieu (Bianchi 1843). One of the first translations into Arabic from a European language was Machiavelli's *Principe*, which was translated but not printed (see Heyworth-Dunne 1940). Botanist Giovanni Battista Brocchi (1722–1826) reported the presence of French philosophical works in the Būlāq school library in 1822. He had visited the Būlāq school, founded in 1821, where “land surveying, mathematics, and Italian, French and Arabic language” (Brocchi 1841, I, p. 159)<sup>4</sup> were taught, and provides a very interesting description of his visit. He reports the presence of Italian and French books from various disciplines, especially military art, but also others, such as agriculture, mathematics, and of the *Encyclopedia* in the old edition. Moreover, he speaks about books on laws and literature, including Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In addition, to Brocchi's surprise, there were works by Voltaire and Rousseau, as well as French novels, and a version of the Bible in French. What Brocchi found more unexpected—for a country which was held to be ruled despotically—was the presence of a large number of political constitutions of European governments (p. 160).

Bianchi's list also includes a compendium of accounts of social and political progress achieved in Europe, consisting of excerpts taken from European works, compiled by the head of the translation office, Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī, who is famous for the account of his journey to Paris ([1834] 2004) and was familiar with French authors such as Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu (Bianchi 1843).<sup>5</sup> He is a very interesting figure, for his role as a link between European ideas—in particular French—and Arab thought. Al-Tahtāwī worked hard in the field

<sup>4</sup>The translation from Italian is mine.

<sup>5</sup>The Arabic text and the Turkish translation of al-Tahtāwī ([1834] 2004) is present in Bianchi's list (1843, p. 42). On al-Tahtāwī see Badawi (1993, p. 11), Hourani (1983, p. 69 ff.). In the field of European thought, he had read, among others, Voltaire, Condillac, Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and the more important works of Montesquieu.

of translation and language teaching, in his role of head of the School of Languages (particularly Italian, French, and English) founded in Cairo in 1835, and from 1841 as chief of the new Translation Office, which gave great impetus to the translations.

During this time the number of European experts and European schools in Egypt, especially related to missionary activity, increased greatly. This had consequences for Syria, occupied by Egypt from 1831 to 1840, with the great diffusion of missions and foreign schools. In the following period, the grandson of Muhammad ‘Alī, Khedive Ismā‘īl (1863–1879), educated in France and interested in promoting education at a “popular” level, marked major changes in the direction of Westernization. In addition to the translation of European legal codes, European methods for administration and finance were also introduced, and Western clothes were adopted by state personnel and professionals. The city of Cairo underwent urban changes in imitation of Paris. In education, teacher training methods were introduced which aimed to combine traditional and European culture, and Western schools, especially those of the French Christian missionaries, continued to increase, as did the presence of the West in general.

From this brief survey, it can be seen that the translation into Arabic of Western literary and philosophical texts did not include German philosophy or the work of Hegel. In fact, not only did the reforms and the impulse to Westernization of this period involve mainly technical-scientific, military, and medical culture, but also it tended to include works written in French, Italian (which was losing its prominence) or English, in comparison to which the German language was of very limited importance and hardly disseminated at all. This trend, which was only at its beginning in Egypt in the early nineteenth century, has been maintained over time and it is therefore not very surprising that there are no signs of direct reception of Hegel’s thought in the Arab world before the second half of the twentieth century.

In fact, for explicit links of Arab thought to Hegel, everything suggests that its direct reception (translations and/or explicit reference to his work) was very late; taking translations into Arabic as a reference point, it did not start before the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>6</sup> It is possible to

<sup>6</sup> ‘Atiya (2008, p. 255) speaks about ‘Alī al-‘Inanī, an Egyptian scholar of the first half of the twentieth century who achieved a doctorate in Germany around 1917, reporting that some authors cite him to be the first student of Hegel in the Arab world.

argue, however, that the thought of Hegel came in another way in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by means which were to some extent “unremarked.” This hypothesis appears plausible when considering the importance of Hegel’s philosophy in general for modern and contemporary thought, and the dissemination of his ideas in Europe and in the United States, which has gone beyond the field of philosophy in the strict sense. Non-explicit influences by German philosophy in general (Fichte in particular) can be found in some nationalist views. For example, Sāti‘ al-Husrī’s work in the 1950s, which focuses on language, is manifestly “derived not only, as with other writers, from English and French thought, but from its roots in German philosophy” (Hourani 1983, p. 312).<sup>7</sup> These kind of views, according to Hourani, spread long before al-Husrī and began to crystallize after 1908, with the reaction of Arabs to the policy of Turkification.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>It is to be noted that he was educated in Turkey.

<sup>8</sup>Rodinson (1972, p. 599) and Haim (1955, pp. 145–146) speak about a kind of “mysticism of the nation,” in relation to Fichte, but also to Hegel. Tibi (1988, p. 177) argues that it was the anti-French reaction provoked by the French Mandate to push intellectuals to seek arguments in the nationalist theories developed by the Germans (Herder and Fichte). On the relationship between Germany and Syria see also Seikaly (1988).

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## The Foreign Universities in Syria: Competition Among the “West”

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on the two Western universities in Ottoman Syria: the Syrian Protestant College (SPC)—later American University of Beirut (AUB)—, and the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), founded in Beirut in the second half of the nineteenth century, which had an important role in transmitting Western ideas and culture. In particular, it focuses on the differences between the two Western institutions (respectively American-Protestant and French-Jesuit), and their competition both in the religious field—of propagation of the respective faiths—and in the cultural-linguistic field.

**Keywords** Syrian Protestant College • American University of Beirut  
Université Saint-Joseph • Jesuits • Syria • American Protestant  
missionaries

The texture of relationships and influences between Western and Arab thought is very complex and consists of many different contributions, not always explicit and declared. In this respect, an important role in transmitting Western ideas and culture was played by the two Western universities founded in Beirut in the second half of the nineteenth century, namely the Syrian Protestant College, which later became American University of Beirut (SPC or AUB), and the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ). As the reference to Hegel is never explicit, traces of his presence can be found mainly in the form of a background, *Weltanschauung* or

*forma mentis*. A survey of the activity of the two universities and of the main ideas held by their representatives and by personalities linked to them can help highlight concepts and views which can be attributed to Hegelian roots in the wider sense.<sup>1</sup>

The SPC and the USJ are the focus of several studies, analyzing their educational policy and their impact on the local population. In particular, many of these studies emphasize that they were created with the intent of implanting cultural values in the Middle East. It is interesting to reflect on the difference of inspiration between the two universities and their competition. In fact, even though they were both founded by missionaries, their inspiration was quite different from the religious point of view: the SPC was founded by Protestant missionaries and the USJ by Catholic missionaries, in particular Jesuits. Another element to keep in mind is the link with the countries of origin, namely the United States and France, which, as it is to be expected, weighed on the cultural policy of the two universities.

The SPC was founded in 1866 as an extension of the American missionary enterprise in the Levant, and can be considered as representative of an expression of the philosophy (especially the philosophy of history) of the American Protestant clergy and of its political vision.<sup>2</sup> In the documents related to the SPC, in the speeches and declarations of intent of its founders and representatives, as well as in the reflections about history and even philosophy of history at the basis of them, are found arguments, statements and views which appear to be very close to Hegel's and in some cases even inspired by his thought (although in some cases revisited and reinterpreted).

The USJ, founded in 1880, through the unification of the schools for higher education already set up by the Jesuits, appears to be different.

<sup>1</sup>As shown above (Part I), the main ideas of Hegel which will be taken into consideration are: the philosophy of history and the role of the different peoples in it; religion and its relationship to science and reason, and to freedom and the modern state; and the opposition between passivity and activity.

<sup>2</sup>The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), led by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, was responsible for the missionary enterprise, which began in the 1820s. After 1870, responsibility for Syria fell to the Presbyterian Board of Missions. For this and other historical information on SPC and USJ, see, among others, Bashshur (1964), Kedourie (1966), Khalaf (2001), Najjar (1961), Scholz (1997), Université Saint-Joseph (1931).



Here the link with Hegel, especially in the inspiration of the founders, does not seem to be present. The leading ideas appear as a unification of “Catholic” and “French” features, as may be seen from the administrative status of the university, which was linked to both the Holy See and the French Government, so that Bashshur, in his comparison between the two universities, highlights that “For USJ, being Catholic was to be French” (1964, p. 45).

From the institutional point of view, the SPC reported to a Board of Trustees subject to the laws of New York State, administered by the President and by the faculty, at first under the supervision of a local Board of Managers (subject to the Board of Trustees), which was composed mostly of missionaries, together with the British and American consuls (Kedourie 1966). Since its inception, the SPC has been independent from the political-ideological direct link with the mother country, but, at the same time, dependent on the particular vision of the missionaries who founded and led it (VanDeMark 2012). In this, it differs from the USJ, which has remained under the direct control of the French government, enjoying its support and its funding.

The official recognition by the Catholic institutions and Pope Leo XIII since 1881 on one hand, together with that of the French Minister of Education and the University of Lyon on the other, made its academic certificates more attractive and expendable. While the SPC was basically a private body: even if it could be assumed that it followed the basic guidelines of the American universities, it was not a part of them. Bashshur (1964) draws attention to the fact that these differences reflect those between educational facilities in France and the United States: on one side centralization and funding from the state and on the other private institutions like many others, with funding to come from private individuals.<sup>3</sup> If for USJ it was easier to survive, the SPC, with its very modest beginnings in a very small building with only 16 students (Jessup 1910), had to make a greater effort to find the right key with its students and to find a balance with the Ottoman power. In addition to not being able to count on a Protestant presence

<sup>3</sup>The SPC was funded by the US government for the first time during the crisis of the 1930s. In 1951 the university signed a contract with the International Cooperation Administration agency of the US government, which marked a big change.

in the area, it did not have the support of an influential nation in the area, such as France (at least at the beginning),<sup>4</sup> while the USJ, except for a period during the First World War,<sup>5</sup> could enjoy the advantages of France's long history in the Middle East, dating back to the "Capitulations" of the sixteenth century.

Between SPC and USJ there was great rivalry; in the cultural field the competition developed mainly in terms of propagation of the respective faiths and the two contending languages. The USJ had as its declared aim the dissemination of French culture and language. The SPC, after a first experiment with teaching in Arabic, moved on to English. A prominent role in the "rebirth" of the Arabic language and literature is generally attributed to the American missionaries by scholars (Antonius 1938); this is partly due to the experiment of teaching in Arabic, which is identified by Penrose as a sign of a profoundly different attitude from that of the French rival:

The language of the people was Arabic and it seemed only natural to the Americans to teach in Arabic. Having no desire, as others had, to "Frankify" the natives for imperialistic purposes, and realizing the untold wealth of the rapidly vanishing Arab culture, it seemed wiser to them to make use of it. (Penrose 1941, p. 6)

In fact, Arabic was chosen after a first failure with teaching in English, which had favored students' emigration to Egypt and America (see Jessup 1910).<sup>6</sup> Important families preferred their children to learn

<sup>4</sup>See Bashshur (1964, p. 58). See also Scholz (1997, p. 333), who points out that American Protestants, who lacked an indigenous basis, had to create a whole new community through proselytism. So they opened to students of all religious communities and combined the teaching of Western rationality with the obligation to participate in Protestant functions.

<sup>5</sup>During the First World War there were difficulties for the USJ, connected to the position of France, which persisted until the end of the war and the beginning of the French Mandate. With independence in 1946 the balance of power changed again. The US gained a position as a Power in the area, while France slowly lost its importance, and this contributed to the growth of the AUB's importance, but at the same time made its position more difficult (a process exacerbated by the contract signed with the US Government in 1951).

<sup>6</sup>Jessup (1910, II, p. 464) connects the phenomenon of emigration to the character of the ancient Phoenicians: "This passion for emigration is the modern awakening of the old Phoenician migrative spirit, after a Rip Van Winkle sleep of more than 2500 years."

European languages (French or English), so the use of Arabic risked leaving too much space to the Jesuits. Thus, although in the SPC’s early years the language of instruction remained Arabic, in 1872, with the founding of the Preparatory Department, it began to revert to English. In 1880 the Literature Department also passed to English, followed by the Medical Department in 1882.

The “vernacular” policy, if persisted in, would have spelt stagnation and failure. Though this may now be forgotten or ignored, the essential condition of survival and expansion was in fact to teach in English, thus ensuring for the University a vital and continuous link with civilization. (Kedourie 1966, p. 90)

On the political field, it is interesting to consider the sharp characterization emerging from the remarks by Bashshur about the difference between the political effects of the two universities:

True to its Protestant-American tradition of freedom of thought and propagation of individual and social welfare, AUB became a fertile ground for radical ideas such as Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism which were not welcomed by the Turks nor by the French after them. (Bashshur 1964, p. 59)

The situation is different for the USJ:

In political attitudes and connections, it remained largely subservient to French interests, the same interests which gave it protection. Instead of producing radicals and nationalists, its graduates turned out to be (at least up to World War II) outstanding theologians, orientalists, and professionals. (Bashshur 1964, p. 59)

These statements show a widespread view among scholars, which is based on the difference between the two universities in their educational policy and even in their political view; however, when taken too sharply they appear to be oversimplifications, underestimating the influence and spread of some ideas inspired by the USJ, and at the same time overestimating the “liberalism” of SPC.

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## CHAPTER 8

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# The Syrian Protestant College: Between Mission and Education

**Abstract** This chapter addresses the educational policy of the Syrian Protestant College (later American University of Beirut), and focuses in particular on the better definition of its relationship with missionary activity, with religion in general, and with “modernity” and freedom. The consideration of the activities of the college and the statements of some of its main representatives, such as Daniel Bliss and his son Howard Bliss, show that, even if the American Protestant missionaries renounced conversions, they did not renounce transmitting their ideas and profound visions.

**Keywords** Syrian Protestant College • American University of Beirut Syria • American Protestant missionaries • Modernity • Religion

The two universities, while having in common the fact that they were founded by Christian missionaries and represented the culmination of Catholic and Protestant educational activities in the region, were very different, not only because of the Christian faith they represented, but also for the different attitude they showed toward their religious inspiration. As both universities were founded by missionaries, their primary vocation was missionary; however, the idea of mission can be understood in various ways and may change over time and through contact with reality.

Khalaf (2001, p. 32) shows the genesis of the foreign missions of the American Protestant missionaries as rooted in the “so-called ‘Great Awakening’ and spiritual revival of New England between 1791 and 1858, inspired by theologians like Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Hopkins and their devoted core of young zealots. It is there that the story of AUB and all other foreign missions began.”<sup>1</sup> Khalaf highlights the great zeal and the presence of medieval prejudices in the spirit of the missionaries. He points out some statements of the various missionary-theologians, such as Levi Parsons, Eli Smith, and Henry Jessup, as examples of varying degrees of prevention and closure with respect to the local populations, and emphasizes how they shared some anti-Islamic prejudices of medieval and modern-romantic origins (like the “imposture” attributes to Muhammad and “decadence” to the Muslim faith), accompanied by the sense of American superiority and the consequent mission that it entailed (see pp. 116–125).<sup>2</sup> Khalaf’s study is inscribed into the wider framework of studies on “Orientalism” and refers explicitly to the work of Edward Said. In this sense, it is concerned with that particular form of “cultural aggression” (p. 119) perpetrated by the missionaries and supported by the belief of being right and the idea of the inferiority of the “others.” Nevertheless, he points out a difference between the missionary purposes and their educational practice, because the latter took a liberal direction in an unforeseen way (see p. 118). Makdisi (1997) also emphasizes a shift from an original more properly “missionary” attitude, which consists of not so much closure and intransigence (as in Khalaf’s description) as of proselytism, and a subsequent position, represented by the foundation of the university, where they switched to a function which can be seen more properly as “modernizing.” It can be observed that modernization was at the center of interest initially, because in the vision of these missionaries it was related to conversion to Christianity, but in the second phase they developed their activities more in the scientific-technological and cultural fields than in the religious field, to meet the needs of the local population.

Several figures contributed to orientate the institution’s educational activity, through discussion and debate. Among them Daniel Bliss and

<sup>1</sup>SPC or AUB indicates hereafter the Syrian Protestant College, which later became the American University of Beirut.

<sup>2</sup>On the idea of American superiority, Khalaf also refers to Josiah Strong, whom I will consider later.

his son Howard, both presidents of the SPC, Henry Jessup, a veteran missionary of Syria, and Elie Smith. They did not, however, share the same vision. Henry Jessup, for example, in 1893 stated:

Education is only a means to an end in Christian missions, and that end is to lead men to Christ and teach them to become Christian peoples and nations. When it goes beyond this and claims to be in itself an end; that mere intellectual and scientific eminence are objects worthy of the Christian missionary [...] then we do not hesitate to say that such a mission has stepped out of the Christian and missionary sphere into one purely secular, scientific and worldly. (Jessup 1910, II, p. 592)

There were those who argued for a kind of education detached at least partly from the missionary enterprise, especially given the fact that they had to confront a variety of different religious experiences and sensibilities. For example, Daniel Bliss, who saw his missionary career as an opportunity to spread freedom and truth in the areas ruled by tyrants, despots, and priests (see Kedourie 1966). The American missionaries' positions also differed in the attitude toward the religious beliefs of the groups with which they came into contact: for some, the Protestant religion was the only truth, while others left more space for the respect and acceptance of different faiths. While Jessup believed in the conversion of Muslims as a necessary stage of history, Daniel Bliss, in his last speech as president of the SPC in 1902 stated:

We do not aim to make Maronites, or Greeks, or Catholics, or Protestants, or Jews, or Moslems, but we do aim to make perfect men, ideal men, God-like men, after the model of Jesus Christ against whose moral character no man ever has said or can say aught. (D. Bliss, as quoted in Penrose 1941, pp. 83–85)

It should be noted that with these statements Daniel Bliss did not give up the idea of the excellence of his religion, which tends to be identified with a broader idea, less tied to a given Christian dogma and more universal. Howard Bliss, his son and successor as president of the university, firmly believed that his religion imposes a liberal attitude, open and respectful towards other faiths, especially the Muslim faith:

In the closing address, given by a responsible officer of the College, the speaker makes it clear that, as a representative of the Christian religion, he is glad to have a sympathetic share in all efforts to strengthen the forces of

righteousness in the world. Praising the splendid democracy that obtained in early times among the Moslems themselves – no rights withheld because of colour, poverty or social status – [...] he pleads that this spirit should not only be maintained among Moslems today, but extended by them so as to embrace all mankind. (Bliss 1920, p. 11)<sup>3</sup>

It can be noticed that these statements appear in an article entitled *The Modern Missionary*, where the term “modern” appears to be linked with some other concepts: religious tolerance, liberalism, democracy, and the Protestant religion. Also interesting is the inaugural speech of 1923 given by Bayard Dodge, son-in-law and successor of Howard Bliss as president of the university, in which these concepts are present:

Protestantism means religious freedom, and as a Protestant institution we wish to give our students freedom of worship and freedom of belief [...]. It is for the mosque, synagogue, or church to provide the practical formalities of organized religion, but the school should join with them in fostering a consciousness of God and a desire to live in accordance with God’s moral purposes. Other influences usually determine membership in one sect or another, but education forms the inward motive to avoid the evil and seek the good [...]. Our University does not champion the cause of any one sect, but she does bind on her armour to champion the cause of the spiritual; of working with God. We wish every student to be religious. (Bayard Dodge, as quoted in Penrose 1941, pp. 292–293)

As rightly pointed out by Kedourie: “The gospel of social service, of democracy and progress, is not the same as the gospel of salvation” (Kedourie 1966, p. 80). So, if it is true that the first president of the SPC Daniel Bliss interpreted “Protestant” and “evangelical” in a very liberal sense, since he was “moulded by the liberalism which prevailed in some ecclesiastical circles in the Occident” (p. 79), it is also true that this is an ideological position among others and not a neutral attitude as it may seem at a first glance. Even if they renounced conversion, they did not renounce transmitting their ideas and profound visions. As noticed above, the religious aspect, although remaining in the shade, was still present and began to be read in a more universalistic way. For example, consider Howard Bliss’ positions on Christianity, which is seen

<sup>3</sup>This is a reprint of an article published in May 1920 in *The Atlantic Monthly* (pp. 664–675).



as a “universal” religion and it is linked to the activity and the tasks of a “modern missionary,” even in the educational–communicative field:

He [the modern missionary] would urge the Church to remember that “Christianity is nothing unless it is universal,” and therefore he would plead with her to set forth the essential things in her faith in terms that all races, all temperaments, all mentalities can apprehend – reserving local terms for non-essentials. (Bliss 1920, p. 29)

This idea is not very different from that expressed by his father, Daniel Bliss, at the foundation of the university of which he would be the first president:

The College is for all conditions and classes of men, without reference to color, nationality, race, or religion. A man, white, black, or yellow, Christian, Jew, Mohammedan, or Heathen, may enter and enjoy all the advantages of the institution for three, four, or eight years and go out believing in one God or many gods or no God; but it will be impossible for anyone to continue with us long without knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief. (Daniel Bliss, as quoted in Bliss 1920, p. 14)

The religious factor remained important in the SPC, as Protestant religion and moral remained very present in its educational policy (with the obligation for everyone to attend prayers and Bible reading); this caused problems with students, local teachers, and the Ottoman authorities. In addition, the founders did not keep their promise to give control of SPC to local teachers and administrators (Scholz 1997). Although students learned to apply critical thinking in scientific or literary activities, they were not allowed to openly criticize the university’s religious character. This has led some scholars, such as Scholz (unlike Bashshur 1964), to emphasize the preponderance of the missionary (and political) factor of the SPC:

The aim of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) of Beirut [...] was to create an entirely new community of Middle Eastern leaders favourable toward the Protestant cause. (Scholz 1997, p. 336)

In particular, the question of mandatory prayer was a great burden for the students, who organized protests on several occasions. One of the most dramatic occurred in 1909, when 200 Muslim and Jewish students

protested against the obligation of prayer and against proselytizing taking place on campus. Although they were inspired by the American principles of religious freedom, and supported by the principles of the new Ottoman Code promulgated in 1908, their requests were rejected. David Stuart Dodge, son of Bayard Dodge and himself future president of the SPC, at a special meeting of the Board held on May 25, 1909, pointed out “seven cogent reasons, for not relaxing the maintenance of the principles involved directly and indirectly in the whole dispute” (Penrose 1941, p. 139), such as the obligation to attend Mass and the study of the Bible. The first reason is simply:

The College was not established merely for higher secular education, or the inculcation of morality. One of its chief objects is to teach the great truths of Scripture; to be a centre of Christian light and influence. (D.S. Dodge, as quoted in Penrose 1941, p. 139)

The Ottoman government had to intervene and in 1914 forbade the university leaders imparting religious education to those who were not Protestant, but in 1915, with the war, everything changed. In 1920, when the name changed to “American University of Beirut”, it was an act of great symbolic importance.

It was inadvisable to continue the term Protestant because students and faculty now represented nearly every religious form in the Near East and there was no point in needlessly emphasizing sectarian distinctions. (Penrose 1941, p. 172)

This change also meant the waiving of the obligation of religious instruction for students and the checking of teachers’ religious orientation.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# Religion and Reason in the View of the American Missionaries in Syria

**Abstract** This chapter deals with the better definition of the idea of Christian Protestant religion held by the American Protestant missionaries in Ottoman Syria, and with their view of the close relation between religion and reason, and religion and “modernity.” Through this consideration it will be possible to highlight similarities between their views and Hegel’s, in particular with relation to his idea of the primacy of Protestant faith, on the ground of the link to reason—concrete reason, which is developing in history—and to freedom.

**Keywords** Hegel · Religion · Reason · American Protestant missionaries · Syrian Protestant College · Modernity · Darwin crisis

In order to understand the orientation of the Protestant missionaries in Syria toward religion, it is important to consider their position vis-à-vis the other Christian faiths present in Syria during the same period, such as the Jesuits of the USJ<sup>1</sup> and the Christian locals, toward whom they often adopted a hard position. They severely criticized the hierarchy of both Roman Catholicism and the Eastern Churches, accusing them of having lost the missionary spirit. This appears clearly from the memories of the important Reverend Henry Jessup, who, in his book *Fifty-Three Years*

<sup>1</sup>USJ indicates the Université Saint-Joseph; SPC and AUB indicate the Syrian Protestant College/American University of Beirut.

*in Syria*, often refers to the situation of Eastern Christians in critical tones. He speaks of “nominal Christians” (1910, I, p. 81),<sup>2</sup> and speaks significantly of the task to “give back the Bible to the East” (p. 57), an expression that goes beyond mere reference, which is also present, to the translation of the Bible concluded by Eli Smith.<sup>3</sup> Although he does note that the Eastern Christians were not free to act, because they lived in a country ruled by Muslims and among a Muslim majority, Jessup considers them—and the Catholics—responsible for the misconception that Muslims have of Christians, that is to say as image-worshippers and superstitious. He holds that “the chief and ultimate object of missionary work in Western Asia is the conversion of the Mohammedans to the Christian faith” (p. 85). This fundamental task becomes much more difficult if Muslims have in front of them a “superstitious” Christianity, which confirms their traditional prejudice. Jessup emphasizes the idea of the simplicity and purity of the Christian faith in contrast to a Christianity that in his eyes has become, as correctly stated by Muslims, a kind of idolatry and a set of superstitious attitudes which allow the clergy to exercise tyrannical power.

The patriarchs and bishops of the East are, as a class, wealthy, avaricious, masters of political intrigue, unscrupulous, and trained to hierarchical tyranny over the consciences of men, and will probably be the last class in the East to accept the Gospel in its simplicity. (Jessup 1910, I, p. 91)

In his account of the various Christian communities in the East, Jessup refers to nearly ten million “nominal Christians,” who have never felt the urge to an “awakening” like the one that shook Europe in the days of the Reformation, and whose clergy holds a temporal power and is involved in political intrigues (pp. 81–82). While he defines Protestant religious converts as “enlightened men and women” (p. 83), a term which is rooted in a religious context, here it seems to have an additional connotation of rationality. The first local Protestant Church was founded

<sup>2</sup>The term was widely used (see Badr 1992). See for example: “Remarks upon the Turks and the Nominal Christians,” in *The Missionary Herald* (1827, p. 108), where it is stated: “The Turks do, indeed, in some respects exhibit more good traits of character than the nominal Christians of this country.”

<sup>3</sup>The translation of the New Testament was printed in 1860; the Old Testament translation was published in 1864.

in 1848 and, according to Jessup, it was very important for the struggle against what he holds to be the “tyranny” of the clergy, through the affirmation of the “simplicity” and “purity” of Christian faith (p. 84). He consistently expounds the idea of a simple and pure Christian religion, a return to the Bible. In general, these ideas are connected not only to the arguments of the Reformation, but also to some features of the criticism of religions developed by the Enlightenment, as suggested for example by the image of “tyrannical” priests and “superstitious” beliefs. In their final result, they concur to establish a parallelism between a certain type of religion (the “true” Christianity) and reason.

A strong link between Protestant religion and rationality is also suggested by the Annual Reports of the SPC:

Mental and moral science is so intimately connected with man’s spiritual nature that opportunities are continually occurring in the classroom to enforce the great fact upon the mind of the student that a pure morality and a rational religious faith are in accordance with the constitution of the human mind, and a necessity to its highest wellbeing. (SPC—Board of Managers 1963, p. 18)

As noted by Kedourie in his remarks about the “Darwin crisis,” the representatives of SPC believed in the rationality of their faith and held the idea that conversion to Protestantism was the inevitable result of a “spirit of inquiry” (Kedourie 1966, p. 84). The missionaries, especially those who were responsible for the SPC, held the idea of a close connection between religion and reason. Because of this close connection, they considered knowledge as a way to reach Protestant faith. This is clearly shown by Howard Bliss, in his description of the characteristics of the “modern” missionary:

He [the modern missionary] would charge her [the Church] to be bolder in making a direct appeal to man’s spiritual nature; to have greater faith in truth, in reality; to be assured that a response will be forthcoming when the challenge is the outcome of the personal experience of the advocate. He would bid her to rehabilitate in the vocabulary of religion the noble words *reason, rational, free-thinking, natural*. (Bliss 1920, p. 29)

The problem that arose with the case of Dr. Edwin Lewis, Professor of Chemistry and Geology at the SPC in 1882, known as “Darwin crisis” has to do exactly with these fundamental ideas. Seeking to present his

arguments on Darwin without offending the religious sensibility, Lewis, in a speech to a class of undergraduates, titled “Knowledge, science and wisdom” (SPC—Board of Managers 1963), emphasized that science and religion present different truths which are to be distinguished. The university leaders, however, did not approve of his arguments and he had to resign. The Professor of Pathology and teacher of Chemistry and Astronomy Cornelius van Dyck, a very important personality, and his son William, who was a teacher in the Medicine Department, followed him. The scientific review “*al-Muqtataf*” was also moved from Beirut, as its founders Ya‘qūb Sarrūf and Fāris Nimr had to leave their posts as tutors at the SPC and move to Cairo (Farag 1972). Student riots and protests followed this episode, which some scholars saw as demonstrating that students had developed a conscience based on secular values, due to their education at the SPC (Leavitt 1981).

The “Darwin crisis” is generally seen as a clash between religious truth and scientific truth, where a religious institution sought to assert the superiority of its views. But, if one considers the positions articulated above on the role of religion, it is possible to think of a different interpretation of the “Darwin crisis,” which can at least be taken into account alongside the more generally held one.<sup>4</sup> If it is true that the idea of a fundamental harmony between religion and rationality was a starting point—very important for this group of which the representatives and leaders of the SPC were part—then it is possible that the real problem caused by Lewis was to have questioned this sensitive point. He undermined a fundamental idea, one which, essential as it was, could not be touched. This is not to deny that there have been and there are problems and deep contrasts between Darwinism and religion in general, but these conflicts were probably aggravated by the fact that Lewis’s speech risked undermining the very foundation of the mission of the SPC in the educational field (and even the whole Syrian Protestant mission).<sup>5</sup>

After the resignation of Lewis and others, the Board began requiring the permanent members of the faculty to sign a “declaration of principles” consisting of ten Articles (partly reported in Penrose 1941), among which

<sup>4</sup>In addition to the interpretation that sees in it the confrontation between religious orthodoxy and scientific spirit, there are others. See for example Allan (2008, p. 116), who speaks of “pre-existing tensions between various administrators and faculty grounded in matter as much personal as intellectual.”

<sup>5</sup>Lewis was aware of this important connection, and refers to it at the end of his speech.

was the affirmation of the Protestant doctrine, “as opposed to the erroneous teachings of the Romish and Eastern Churches” and the emphasis on the “chief aim of this institution,” which is “a missionary agency” and aims “to train up young men in the knowledge of Christian truth” (p. 47).

We further pledge ourselves to the inculcation of sound and reverent views of the relation of God to the natural universe, as its Creator and supreme Ruler, and to give instruction in the special department assigned to us, in the spirit and method best calculated to conserve the teachings of revealed truth and to demonstrate the essential harmony between the Bible and all true science and philosophy. (Penrose 1941, p. 48)

The basic assumption is that Christian religion and reason are in harmony, and therefore simultaneously that thought and an “enlightened” mind, or a mind ready to be so, will lead to the Protestant faith. This represents a simplified and purified Christian message, and is held to correspond more to the Gospel, the fundamental core of Christianity, when compared to the Christianity practiced in Syria until then, as it is not modified (or perverted) by dogmas, tradition, and history. The “local” as well the “historical” elements are considered of secondary importance, when not “superstitious,” in front of a faith which is presented as “universal,” “rational,” and for this reason “modern”; a faith that does not contradict human rationality and does not obstruct the development of free thinking and political freedom.

The role of religion and its relationship to rationality and freedom is one of the aspects to consider in relation to the search of a possible influence by Hegel’s philosophy. In fact, Hegel held the primacy of Protestant faith in comparison to the Catholic and all others, on the ground of the link to reason—not an abstract but a concrete reason, which is developing in history—and to freedom. He considered it a sign of the achievement by a given society of a level of “development,” in which individual freedom is conceivable as a value. For Hegel, the religious beliefs of a people express its deep feeling and its self-representation. For this reason, it can be said that being Protestant is to have reached a certain degree of awareness and “modernity,” even political. While Catholic Christianity is still bound to an element of finitude, which does not allow for thinking about the dialectic unity between the individual and the absolute, between the world and God, so it belongs to a context which is not (or not yet) “free” and “modern.” Protestant religion is confined within the



limits of the form “religion,” remains linked to representation, and does not reach “pure” thinking, namely philosophy; however, it represents the highest level reached by the form “religion,” because it reaches the idea of God as “Spirit” living in his community.

The idea of harmony between religion and reason can be connected to an interpretation of Hegel’s view on religion which was influential in the United States and can be found, for example, in *Studies in Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion* by J. Macbride Sterrett, Professor of Ethics and Apologetics at the Seabury Divinity School from 1882 to 1892, and at the George Washington University (previously Columbian University) from 1892 to 1909:

His [Hegel’s] whole work is to reconcile reason with religion by finding reason in religion and religion in reason. It explicates, in the form of thought, the content of religion, which is ordinarily held in the form of feeling or metaphor, or at best in the form of faith, or abbreviated knowledge. (Macbride Sterrett 1890, p. IX)<sup>6</sup>

In Hegel’s vision, Christianity in general is related to individual freedom, but it is particularly in Protestant Christianity that real freedom can be realized, consisting of harmony not only between religion and reason, but also between religion and the ethical values of the modern state. J. Macbride Sterrett points out Hegel’s idea of a connection between the Protestant religion and the modern world:

The Protestant conscience is the ethical (*Sittliche*) conscience, which harmonizes with the principle of free political life [...]. He considered the Reformation [...], to be, in one aspect, the abrogation and the reconciliation of the unethical dualism between the Church and the world of ethical (*Sittliche*) institutions of family and state. Religion now esteems the secular life as sacred; affirms the family life to be more ethical than celibacy, and Christian rulers, as well as priests, to be the servants of the Lord. Thus Christianity came to build up the great ethical world of modern life. (Macbride Sterrett 1890, p. 313)

<sup>6</sup>Macbride Sterrett (1890, pp. v–ix) laments the lack of a full translation of Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, which would be published in 1895 (Hegel [1832] 1895). The already existing partial translations, edited by F. Louis Soldan, had been published in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* between 1881 and 1887 (see Hodgson 2007, p. 33).

Protestant religion makes possible the reconciliation of the dualism between the Church and the modern state. For Hegel, and similarly for the American Protestant missionaries in Syria, it has a deep link with “modernity,” rationality, and freedom. In Protestant Christianity, speculative thought and religion find a common ground; in this sense, religion and reason, as well as religion and the ethic of modern state, are not in conflict. In this respect, Hegel seems to be in tune with the representatives of the SPC. However, two differences can be outlined. Firstly, Hegel does not share the point of view on religion which is typically held by the Enlightenment, which refers to a “rational/natural religion,” a universal one, which is achievable and thinkable by everyone without concrete references to tradition, institutions, and contents, and which, for Hegel—for this reason—is an abstract one. In this respect, the view of Protestant religion as linked to rationality in general, as “purified” and “universal,” seems to be close to the Deist view of God as “Great Being,” which Hegel criticized and refuted. Secondly, as self-representation and self-understanding of a given people and “world,” religion is a historical phenomenon. Even in the case of the “absolute” (or “consummate”) religion, namely Christianity. It makes no sense to separate it from its context and development, and to “purify” it by all its contents linked to representation and tradition. In relation to Christianity in particular, according to Hegel it makes no sense to speak about a return to its origins, because God lives in the religious communion, in the community of believers (*Gemeinde*), which is developing in history (see Hegel [1807] 1931, pp. 764–765).

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## CHAPTER 10

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# The Presence of Hegelian Elements in the Thought of Josiah Strong

**Abstract** This chapter addresses the views of Josiah Strong and the link with Hegel's thought. Strong was a prominent figure among Protestant missionaries in the United States, an important example of a politically active American missionary, influential on foreign policy, and a prominent thinker about philosophy of history. His connection to Hegel's thought is evident when considering his general position, as well as his explicit references to Hegel.

**Keywords** Hegel · Josiah Strong · American Protestant clergymen  
American Protestant missionaries · Philosophy of history  
Anglo-Saxons

Hegel's thought was known in the United States and some thinkers and men of culture in general were inspired, more or less openly, by it.<sup>1</sup> Among them were exponents of the Protestant clergy, including Josiah Strong, author of *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885) and *The New Era* (1893). Strong was a prominent figure among missionaries in the United States, as a member of the American Home

<sup>1</sup>We have already seen Macbride Sterrett. One prominent example of Hegelian influence is the School of Saint-Louis. On the reception of Hegel's thought in America see, among others: Cook and Leavelle (1943), Muirhead (1928), Goetzmann (1973), Pochman (1970), Muelder and Sears (1940). See also Rogers (2005).

Missionary Society and for a period (1894–1898) of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which was directly responsible for the Syrian mission. He is an important example of a politically active American missionary, influential on foreign policy,<sup>2</sup> and a prominent thinker about philosophy of history, who was even considered a promoter of American imperialism, especially for his statements in *Our Country* about “The Anglo-Saxon and the World’s Future” (Strong 1885, pp. 159–179). His connection with Hegel’s thought is evident when considering his general position, as well as his explicit references to Hegel, although they are actually taken from a compendium of Hegel’s philosophy of history and political philosophy by George S. Morris (1887).<sup>3</sup>

In *The New Era*, Strong emphasizes the importance of two fundamental elements that must develop in parallel within every civilization: the principle of individuality and that of social organization; he criticizes Hegel (and Guizot) for not recognizing these two principles as the foundations of historical development (Strong 1893).<sup>4</sup> Strong refers explicitly to Hegel (or rather to the compendium of his thoughts by Morris) on the importance of the mixing up of races, since no nation which has played an important role in world history “has ever issued from the simple development of a single race along unmodified lines of blood-relationship; there must be differences, conflict, a composition of

<sup>2</sup>He played a leading role in applying intense pressure on American foreign policy towards Turkey. On this topic see Reed (1972), who mainly deals with Strong’s activity in relation to the Armenian question.

<sup>3</sup>Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*) were translated into English in 1861 by John Sibree, from the second edition of Hegel’s *Werke*, edited by Eduard Gans and Karl Hegel (1840). As noted earlier, Hegel’s published lectures were not written directly by Hegel: the text has been built by the editors from listeners’ transcripts. Knowledge of German thought was also spread through compendia of the main authors, such as Morris’s “Griggs’ Philosophical Classics,” a series which is focused on German thought (“Devoted to a Critical Exposition of the Masterpieces of German Thought”). In this series, as well as the compendium *Hegel’s Philosophy of the State and History* by Morris (1887), from which Strong’s quotations are taken, *Hegel’s Logic* by W.T. Harris (1890) was published. On G.S. Morris see Wenley (1917).

<sup>4</sup>It can be noted, however, that these two elements are very similar to what Hegel sees as “individuality” and “substance,” and that Guizot also highlights the importance for civilization of the development of both the individual and society (see Guizot [1828] 1899, p. 9 ff.).

opposed forces” (Strong 1893, p. 47).<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on the mixture of races and on movement–conflict–composition (dialectics) is very important in this context, because of its difference to the ideas of nation and race on which the construction of the Lebanese identity is based. Strong quotes Hegel again (from Morris’s compendium) about the importance of the figure of Christ, who represents the end of past history and the starting point of the future.

And there in Palestine, where these three civilizations [Greek, Roman and Jewish] met in most perfect conjunction, appeared He whose advent Hegel calls “the goal of all previous history and the starting-point for all history to come.” (Strong 1893, p. 115)<sup>6</sup>

Attention to Palestine as a territory and a fundamental meeting place for world-historical civilizations (emphasis which is absent in Hegel’s corresponding text) may also be due to the role played by Strong in the missionary world and the importance that the Holy Land had for this. In describing the role of different peoples in history and at the beginning of history, Strong also expresses positions similar to those of Hegel. Indeed, history begins with the great Asian plains and nomadic shepherding, and the valleys of the great Asian rivers, along which the “great civilizations of Asia” (p. 23) have developed. Moreover, even in Strong’s view, China represents “the most striking example of conservatism and permanence” (p. 25), and Greece the highest development of individuality.

In *Our Country*, Strong speaks of a clear westward direction of culture and empire, similar to the Hegelian vision, although not citing Hegel, but other authors, such as John Adams and Adam Smith, with the intention above all of finding support for the affirmation of American excellence. Another interesting element is the value attributed to movement and activity. One of the qualities that Strong attributes to the Anglo-Saxon “race,” in fact, is its “intense and persistent energy,” which then in America develops in a particular “eager activity and effectiveness” (Strong 1885, p. 173), due in part to the favorable climate, but above all to the organization of society, characterized by a mobility which in Europe is unknown. In fact, while in America society is “like the waters of the sea, mobile,” in Europe the social classes are “fixed and fossilized”

<sup>5</sup>Strong here is quoting from Morris (1887, p. 181).

<sup>6</sup>Strong here is quoting from Morris (1887, p. 227).

(p. 174) like the layers of the earth. In addition, the peculiar qualities of the Americans will be useful, according to Strong, when it comes to a new stage in history, represented by the final competition among the races.

Then this race of unequalled energy, with all the majesty of numbers and the might of wealth behind it – the representative, let us hope, of the largest liberty, the purest Christianity, the highest civilization – having developed peculiarly aggressive traits calculated to impress its institutions upon mankind, will spread itself over the earth. (Strong 1885, p. 175)

This new stage in history is introduced with the expression “The time is coming when.” The tone is of a prediction (see Reed 1972), as if there were a movement of history that inevitably leads to a certain direction; this predictive feature is alien to Hegelian thought. According to Strong, it is also inevitable that the inferior race is absorbed by the superior (Strong 1885). Unlike Hegel he emphasizes the idea of the superiority of one race over the other and its consequent dominion over the world, which is seen as a task. In fact, in the final part of the chapter he summarizes his vision in a series of rhetorical questions that serve to urge the present American generation to fulfill its fate of leading the West and humanity.

Is it manifest that the Anglo-Saxon holds in his hands the destinies of mankind for ages to come? Is it evident that the United States is to be the home of this race, the principal seat of his power, the great center of his influence? Is it true that the great West is to dominate the nation’s future? Has it been shown that this generation is to determine the character, and hence the destiny, of the West? Then may God open the eyes of this generation! (Strong 1885, p. 175)

He then cites a sentence attributed to Napoleon when speaking to his army in Egypt, in the shadow of the pyramids: “Remember that from yonder heights forty centuries are looking down upon you” (p. 176), and he takes from it another exhortation for the present generation:

Men of this generation, from the pyramid top of opportunity on which God has set us, we look down on forty centuries! We stretch our hand into the future with power to mold the destinies of unborn millions. (Strong 1885, p. 176)

Here, Strong establishes a bridge between past and future: a peak of history, from which it is possible to reconsider the whole past and to project oneself into the future. His aim is to accelerate the coming of the kingdom of God, whose realization must be helped and pushed in the direction that appears clear from this peak of history. Regarding the attitude towards the future, in *The New Era* Strong speaks widely of the ideas of “destiny” and “providence,” and he affirms, in particular:

Thus far men have generally worked out the divine plan blindly. The great forward steps of the race have been taken unintelligently. (Strong 1893, p. 30)

Now that the divine plan is manifest, men have the task of promoting its realization.

Science, which is a revelation of God’s laws and methods, enables us to fall into his plans intentionally and to co-operate with him intelligently for the perfecting of mankind, thus hastening forward the coming of the kingdom. (Strong 1893, p. 30)

These positions are very different to those held by Hegel, who, while arguing that rationality is manifest in history, believes that no statement can be made about the future, but only about what has already happened. In the passage of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* dedicated to America as a country of the future, Hegel adds remarks on the role of philosophy:

As a Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards *History*, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is. In regard to *Philosophy*, on the other hand, we have to do with that which (strictly speaking) is neither past nor future, but with that which *is*, which has an eternal existence — with Reason; and this is quite sufficient to occupy us. (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 104)

Another aspect to be noticed is that in these statements Strong establishes an important link between science, reason, and faith, resembling what has emerged above in the attitude of Protestant missionaries in Syria.

Strong’s statements about the excellence of the Christian West, the Anglo-Saxon race, and hence of the United States, can be traced back to a particular interpretation of Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. On one hand, they can be connected to Hegel’s view because of the



movement of the “Spirit” (“free” institutions, respect for the individual, rationality, awareness, etc.) in world history described by Hegel, which goes from East to West, and sees the Germans as the most recent protagonists of history. Moreover, Hegel’s affirmations about America suggest that it could be the protagonist of the history of the future. On the other hand, the emphasis on “race” is distant from the Hegelian vision and is close to both a scientific and biological point of view and to the idea that a “people” is bound by language and “blood,” which belong to other contexts such as Darwinism or Romanticism.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the presence of a “divine providence,” which is also present in a certain form in Hegel’s view, in a religious context has a much more central role, and above all (similarly to other features), in this context takes another direction, which is extraneous to Hegel’s philosophical project. Thus, Strong can speak of voluntary cooperation with the divine goals, with the certainty that these goals, namely the Good, consist of the scientific and cultural progress of humanity, while for Hegel the Good is not to be determined abstractly, but is the result of the making of the reality and history.

Strong was not the only American Protestant clergyman to express ideas of this kind on history and the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race and the American nation. As pointed out by Smylie (1963), there are many authors who have contributed to the formation of this vision, which counts Hegel’s thought among its inspirations, such as Elisha Mulford (1887), Elias Lyman Magoon (1856), and Philip Schaff (1846, 1856).<sup>8</sup> As highlighted by Smylie, according to these authors’ views, developed mainly in the years after the war of secession, history is moved by the providence, by God’s hand, who is acting through nations, which are the protagonists of history. In history, the primacy of the American nation can be shown. Those thinkers share with Hegel the view of the course of history going from East to West, although they—unlike Hegel and like Strong—believe that the final stage, or the present highest stage, is represented by America. Anglo-Saxons are held to be the historical people of the century, as shown by empirical facts, such as the exceptional growth of

<sup>7</sup>Strong cites Spencer’s assertion on the excellence, from a biological point of view, of a type of man made up of the best parts of the Aryan race, being more plastic and adaptable (Strong 1893, p. 172).

<sup>8</sup>In some cases, these authors explicitly refer to Hegel’s thinking, as in the Preface in *The Nation* by E. Mulford (1887). On the influence of Hegel on Mulford and the latter on the Protestant Progressive thought, see Brown (1984).

Anglo-Saxon populations and colonies all over the world, together with the spread of the English language.<sup>9</sup> In the more strictly religious aspect, those ideas are in tune with Hegel's view of the relationship between religion and the state, and his consideration of the Protestant religion, because they consider the United States as the peak of the historical movement, characterized by the highest religion, Protestant Christianity.

Some of the ideas outlined here as typifying the thought of some American Protestant clergymen and lying very close to Hegel's philosophy, although reinterpreted and adapted to their own horizons of thought (American, Protestant, and, in the case of Strong, missionary), are also present—as seen above—in the positions of American missionaries in Syria. Similar views of history and civilization are present in the textbooks adopted by the Syrian Protestant College. Unlike the Université Saint-Joseph, they were chosen from those adopted at American universities and were not imposed by a government or a central body, so it can be said that they largely reflect the position of the college. Some of the key concepts we have seen in this and earlier chapters are to be found in them, with some additional elements.

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<sup>9</sup>See Strong, who holds that English language "is the great agent of Christian civilization throughout the world" (Strong 1885, p. 178). He also cites German philologist Jacob Grimm about his statement of the excellence of the German language (p. 179).

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## The Textbooks of Syrian Protestant College and Hegel's Philosophy of History

**Abstract** This chapter presents a survey of the history textbooks adopted by the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries, which is fruitful in shedding light on the ideological attitude of the college, and showing connections with Hegel's thought. It also considers the possible influence on the students of the college of those ideas about history, the Arabs and the Turks.

**Keywords** Hegel · World history · American Protestant College  
History textbooks · Philosophy of history · Arabs · Turks · Islam

A survey of the history textbooks adopted by the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries<sup>1</sup> can be very fruitful in shedding light on the ideological attitude of the college (see Scholz 1997), and showing connections with Hegel's thought in its "American" or "Anglo-Saxon" variant. In the history textbooks used in the SPC, there are some expressions and positions which look very similar to those used by Hegel in his

<sup>1</sup>Among others: Adams (1902), Coe (1892), Lord (1875), van Ness Myers (1882, 1886), Rannie (1881), Robinson (1902), Swinton (1875). Information about the adopted textbooks can be found in the college's catalogues (see SPC 1880–1890, 1890–1900, 1900–1905, 1905–1906/1909–1910, 1910–1915).

*Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. For example, on the subject of the Turks, van Ness Myers argues:

The Turanians have never evinced any aptitude for the arts and sciences, or love for the higher walks of culture. (van Ness Myers 1882, p. 3)

In addition, he affirms that they were not influenced by the West and its civilization, in regard to which they were “quite insensible” (van Ness Myers 1886, p. 244). Lord, too, when addressing the despotism that reigns with the Turks, emphasizes that its evils are “frequently aggravated by the ignorance and effeminacy of those to whom power is entrusted” (Lord 1875, p. 295). He also adds some judgments that sound very close to those seen in Hegel, which concern sensuality, idleness, and decay:

The character of the people partakes of the nature of their Nation-government, religion, and climate. They are arrogant and ignorant; fastidiously abstemious in some things, and grossly sensual in others. They have cherished the virtue of hospitality, and are fond of conversation; but their domestic life is spent in voluptuous idleness, and is dull and insipid compared with that of Europeans. Greatly indeed have they degenerated since the time when they founded an immense empire on the ruins of Asiatic monarchies, and filled the world with the terror of their arms. (Lord 1875, p. 295)

As seen above in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel deeply underestimates the moral attitude and the cultural value of the Turks, as he affirms that with the Osman, the East “sank into the grossest vice” and that there was a direct cultural influence from the Arabs to the West, as “Science and knowledge, especially that of philosophy, came from the Arabs into the West” (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 377). He deals with the Arabs<sup>2</sup> in the “Germanic world,” with respect to their superiority at the beginning, and how they developed a great civilization and reached a high level of cultural development. Swinton expresses the same view:

<sup>2</sup>Actually, he deals with Islam, which at the beginning is mainly represented by the Arabs (and Arabic language), and—later on—tends to be identified with the “Arab” Caliphate and al-Andalus. In the *Aesthetics* (Hegel [1835] 1975) he deals with Arab literature, in both in the pre-Islamic and Islamic period.

When Europe was sunk in the grossest ignorance, this clever people were actively engaged in the cultivation of science, learning, and the arts. (Swinton 1875, pp. 231–232)<sup>3</sup>

Van Ness Myers emphasizes the high conquests of Arab culture in all fields, particularly under the rule of the Abbasid, when

science and philosophy and literature were most assiduously cultivated by the Arabian scholars and the court of the Caliphs presented in culture and luxury a striking contrast to the rude and barbarous courts of the kings and princes of the Western Christendom. (van Ness Myers 1886, p. 101)

Yet these same authors also talk about the fact that this civilization has “stopped.” This fact is mainly attributed to what van Ness Myers (1886, p. 104) clearly defines as “the defects of Islam,” to which he devotes a paragraph, where he argues that many principles of Islam are “most unfavorable to human liberty, progress and improvement” (p. 105). This is not only due to fatalism, sensuality, and polygamy, but also to the distance Islam sees between man and God.

It removes God to an inconceivable distance from humanity, denies all possibility of communion and sympathy between the human soul and the Infinite Spirit and thus represses all spiritual aspirations and growth. (van Ness Myers 1886, p. 105)

Van Ness Myers’ stance is very interesting, because it is close to Hegel’s idea of the Islamic God as “abstract God,” which means first of all that God is not conceived as “Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> He speaks of Islam as a “dead Revelation” (p. 106) which lacks power of expansion and vitality, because it is unable to adapt to new human needs. Adams, too, states that the Muslim religion sets limits to progress. In fact, even though—as a religion—it represents a “distinct advance” with respect to the situation in pre-Islamic Arabia (also because of the elements the Prophet in

<sup>3</sup>He uses the term “Saracens.”

<sup>4</sup>Van Ness Myers (1886, p. 104) also affirms that Arab civilization has left no other traces apart from faith. According to Hegel, “The great empire of the Caliphs did not last long: for on the basis presented by Universality nothing is firm” (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 376); in this way he attributes the fall of the Arab caliphate to Islam and to its logical structure, which is based on the abstract universality of God.

his view has taken from other religions) “in the fact the progress under its influence seems possible only up to a certain point” (Adams 1902, p. 55). The problem here is that it goes too much along “the lower side of human nature” (p. 55).<sup>5</sup>

Some of these authors attribute the cause of the crusades to the Seljuks and their abuses toward the pilgrims. Through this argument they emphasize the distance between Christians and Turks, and at the same time the proximity and mutual respect between Christians and Arabs (see Swinton 1875; Adams 1902). Adams, explaining the terms of the “Eastern Question,” about which European diplomacy has been concerned for more than a century, adds a remark that is to be found in Hegel ([1840] 2001, p. 377) and Voltaire ([1756] 1963, I, p. 838), noting that the Turkish empire was kept alive only by divisions among Europeans.

The difficulty has not been to overthrow the Turk, for, if he had been left to himself, his dominion would have ended long ago, but it has been to find a disposition of his territories which would satisfy all the interested parties. (Adams 1902, p. 377)

The rivalries among the European states and the difficulty in finding an arrangement among them have “kept the Turkish Empire a long time dying” (p. 377). Fanny Coe, in her book about the history of Europe for schoolchildren, dedicates a paragraph to “the stranger in Europe”:

In south-eastern Europe live a strange people. Their faces are sallow and calmly sullen; they wear long robes and upon their heads are either fezzes or bright-colored arrangements of cloth called turbans. (Coe 1892, p. 349)

They did not have tables and chairs in their houses until recently: they sat on beautiful Eastern carpets and “smoked in tranquil silence” (p. 349).<sup>6</sup> Five times a day they wash and pray, prostrating and turning south-west.

<sup>5</sup>Adams describes Muslim religion as a “tremendous enthusiasm” (Adams 1902, p. 56), a definition which brings to mind Hegel’s definition of “fanaticism,” which is “an enthusiasm for something abstract” (Hegel [1840] 2001, p. 375). See also Robinson (1902, pp. 64–74) for a description of Islam of different kind. Much more detailed and informed, it does not present the particularly negative opinions seen above, and—unlike what other authors claim—he says that some buildings, such as those erected in Spain, “still stand” (p. 73).

<sup>6</sup>As seen above, the idea of the Oriental calm and tranquility is also present in Hegel, with regard to the Turks.

Who are these people, so unlike other Europeans in appearance and religion? They are the Turks, and theirs is the only nation in Europe not a Christian one. What are they doing in Christian Europe? And why do they not return to Asia, the land of the Mohammedans? (Coe 1892, pp. 349–350)<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the very conception of history, these texts are mainly in line with the idea of a unique world history, which is progressively developing and is dominated by Western civilization. According to Swinton, who adds as subtitle to his *Outlines of the World's History* “with special relation to the history of civilization and the progress of mankind,” narration of history “in its modern sense” is the history of nations and not of dynasties or battles: “history as a showing forth of the life of nations, in place of history as the mere biography of kings, or the record of battles and sieges, of dynasties and courts” (Swinton 1875, p. iv). For van Ness Myers, the main achievements of the modern era are the Reformation and French revolution:

The French Revolution is in political what the German Reformation is in ecclesiastical history. It was the revolt of French people against royal despotism and class privilege. (van Ness Myers 1886, p. 577)

According to Hegel, these are fundamental moments of the modern era, which have led to “absolute knowing.” Modern freedom does not depend solely on political institutions, nor is it achieved only through the activity of the individual, which is fundamental: it is also consciousness, knowledge, and reason. Overcoming submission to any not only political but also religious and intellectual authority, except the Kantian “Tribunal of Reason,” is an “enlightenment” in politics as well as in religion, and a distinctive mark of the modern era. This is well illustrated by one of the questions that Swinton (1875, pp. 3–4) puts at the basis of his historical reflection: “what is the series of events that has brought the world up to its present standard of enlightenment and knowledge?”

In the list of fundamental civilizations of history—very similar for the various authors—are: ancient Egyptians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Jews, Phoenicians, and Persians (van Ness Myers 1882).

<sup>7</sup>Coe (1892, p. 356) also affirms that the Turks prefer to be buried on the Asian side, perhaps because they feel that their stay in Europe will not last long.



Then Greeks and Romans, who are considered much more important for the development of civilization. Swinton's (1875, p. 8) observations about Asia's nomadic peoples, who "have played no part in history," apart from Mongols and Tartars, who from time to time have conquered civilian peoples, is very similar to Hegel's consideration. Semites played a role in the religious field, but for the rest they "do not make nearly so important or so conspicuous a figure in history as do the Aryans, or Indo-Europeans" (p. 4). They have never been a progressive race, but conservative, and have not played an important role in the development of freedom. Again like Hegel, a prominent role is commonly attributed to the Germanic nations, who love freedom and have adopted Christianity.<sup>8</sup> For van Ness Myers (1886, p. 10), as well as a "reverence for Womanhood," Nordic or Teutonic peoples have a

boundless capacity for growth, for culture, for civilization, which saved the countries of the West from the sterility and barbarism reserved for those of the East that were destined to be overrun and taken possession of by the Turanian hordes. (van Ness Myers 1886, p. 9)

Adams exalts in the Anglo-Saxon race and the position it has reached globally, attracting the envy of other races.

The position which the Anglo-Saxon race now occupies in the world, if its two halves be taken together, is one which no other race has ever held before or holds at present. (Adams 1902, p. 407)

This brief survey shows that the proximity between Hegel's position and the views expressed in the history textbooks adopted by the SPC go beyond the simple fact of moving in the perspective of "World history." There are similarities in relation to some specific positions, for example on the "lack of culture" of the Turks, their inertia, and "Eastern" tranquility, as well as the leadership of the Teutonic peoples (English more than Germans), and even the exaltation of the French revolution and the Reformation. It is probable that such ideas spread among students.

<sup>8</sup>See also Rannie (1881, p. 175), on the English Constitution: "When we think of the law and liberty which we enjoy, and of the small amount of civil war and revolution with which our past is burdened, may we not congratulate ourselves that our island was colonized by those old German tribes with their great talent for governing, and truly say that the English Constitution is a strong and successful one?"

In Scholz's analysis (1997, p. 249) of the students' publications<sup>9</sup> are found—among others—the contrast between “alive” and “dead” nations,<sup>10</sup> the idea of Oriental “passivity” (though with the idea that it now is an almost obsolete attitude),<sup>11</sup> the exaltation of the Arab past and the virtues of the Arabs even in modern times, which in some cases are held to be superior in relation to “bravery, honesty, self-denial, mercy and helpfulness, simple-heartedness, and above all, an unbound, proverbial generosity” (quoted in Scholz 1997, p. 261).<sup>12</sup>

Even the scholars who are most critical towards its activity, agree on the role of the SPC in having stimulated “liberal and secular transformations of great magnitude” (Khalaf 2001, p. 118) in the Middle East. According to Scholz (1997, p. 240) students have used the same criticism against the authorities of the college that the textbooks showed to the Ottomans, and also to the Arabs. He holds that the various “crises” and protests of the students show that they, “partially acculturated to Western thought” (p. 340), have discovered and criticized the contradictions between Western rationality and Protestant doctrine (p. 341).<sup>13</sup> One of the strongest supporters of the positive role of the SPC is George Antonius, who affirms:

<sup>9</sup>Scholz (1997, p. 249) observes that: “the student publications mirror the contents of the American textbooks used in the classrooms.” Scholz underlines that these publications represented primarily an opportunity to exercise writing, in both English and Arabic (also a few in French).

<sup>10</sup>As for example in the article by ‘Abd al-Sattar Khairi, titled “Life of an Oriental” (*Light*, V, 1906, pp. 12–13), where he writes: “Live, live, I do not want you to die. Oh, be not among the dead / nations. Nations have lived and died, but you have not lived yet. / Live, Live, Live, and demand your share in the world” (as quoted in Scholz 1997, pp. 252–253).

<sup>11</sup>G. Bie Ravndal, in his article titled “‘The Pharaohs of the East.’ A light from America in the Levant” (*The Evangelist*, XIII, October 31, 1901), writes: “Oriental passivity and drifting—peaceful, fatalistic acceptance of the smiles and buffet of fate, are giving place to the energy for combat and perseverance” (as quoted in Scholz 1997, p. 255).

<sup>12</sup>Scholz here quotes an article by I. Abu Mas‘ud, titled “A Comparison between English and Arabic Poetry” (*The Student Union Gazette*, I, November 1915). This idea was very common in Europe and may well be found in the pages of Hegel, Goethe, and Voltaire, among others.

<sup>13</sup>See also Anderson (2008, p. 102), who observes that “The SPC/AUB message about thinking freely meant to them the right not only debate all intellectual subjects in the classroom, as liberal education called on them to do, but also the demand that the right to freedom of inquiry extend beyond those walls. They also rejected the paternalistic control over character the SPC/AUB leaders claimed as their legitimate and unilateral right.”

When account is taken of its contribution to the diffusion of knowledge, of the impetus it gave to literature and science, and of the achievements of its graduates, it may justly be said that its influence on the Arab revival, at any rate in its earlier stage, was greater than that of any other institution. (Antonius 1938, p. 43)

The first period of work of the American missionaries is of exceptional merit, because “they gave the pride of place to Arabic, and, once they had committed themselves to teaching in it, put their shoulders with vigour to the task of providing an adequate literature” (p. 43). In this they were pioneers, to which “the intellectual effervescence which marked the first stirrings of the Arab revival” (p. 43) owes much. Antonius (1938) also recognizes the important role played by the Université Saint-Joseph and the Jesuits, while other Catholic orders that have been involved in cultural activities in Syria have had minor roles. Antonius especially recalls the figures of Nasīf al-Yazījī and Butrus al-Bustānī, who were linked to the American missions (they were friends with Eli Smith and Cornelius van Dyck, and—in particular al-Bustānī—collaborated in the translation of the Bible into Arabic) and were protagonists of important cultural activities, which marked the “awakening” of the Arabic culture and language and represented the germ of Arab nationalism. Actually, Arab nationalism was not born until the 1930s, whereas previously we can speak of an anti-Turkish movement, following the policy of pan-Turanism inaugurated in 1908 (Haddad 1977). The vision of a radical difference (in “civilization”) between Arabs and Turks is present in the textbooks adopted by the SPC; yet this does not necessarily mean that the SPC and the Protestant missionaries in general played a decisive role in its spread, although of course it could be particularly welcomed by the Arabs, for its encouragement to distinguish and to see themselves as capable of modernization “against” the supposed “passivity” of the Turks.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# The Université Saint-Joseph and French Culture

**Abstract** This chapter considers the views and educational policy of the Jesuit Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), with its influence on Lebanese nationalism and its close link to French government, culture, and language. Through this brief consideration it is possible to highlight some main points of distance from Hegel's views, and a closer connection with the views of the Enlightenment.

**Keywords** Hegel · Université Saint-Joseph · France · Jesuits  
Enlightenment · Lebanese nationalism · Phoenicia

The role of the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) appears to be different to that of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC), and not linked to Hegel's thought. Many studies point out that the USJ had great influence, not so much in developing a habit of thinking in terms of free thinking, rights, and rationality, like the SPC, but in the development of a certain idea of Lebanese identity.<sup>1</sup> This is very important, because the elite who led Lebanon in the period of the Mandate and after the conquering of the independence, were mainly educated at USJ. The creation of the autonomous province in 1861, which included Mount Lebanon and excluded Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and the Biqa' valley, had encouraged

<sup>1</sup>On this topic see, among others: Firro (2004), Kaufmann (2001, 2004), Salibi (1971).

the development of the Lebanese sense of identity, especially among the Maronites, who were the majority in the province. The fact that France would see the region as part of its legacy, combined with ties to the Maronite Christians traced back to the Crusades, stimulated French scholars and teachers to examine and conduct research on the history of the region. Thus, the Oriental faculty of the USJ, founded in 1902, became a center of development and diffusion of archaeological, historical, and philological knowledge about the area.

The University exposed its students to various fields of knowledge that strengthened the sense of their particular identity. Syro-Lebanese students learned about their country in the University's Oriental Faculty through archaeology, philology and history. (Kaufmann 2004, p. 3)<sup>2</sup>

The work of teachers, including Fathers Pierre Martin and Henri Lammens, was used by Lebanese intellectuals to promote the idea of a Lebanese nationalism, separated from Syrianism. These contributed to the spread of concepts that helped the Lebanese Christians, especially Maronites, to formulate in nationalistic terms their traditional particularism.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Lammens, who sees Syria as a non-Arab separate entity and Lebanon as a sub-entity, traced back to the Phoenicians, is seen as the inspirer of Lebanese nationalism, through his lectures and articles (Lammens 1921; Martin 1889).<sup>4</sup>

The image of Lebanon as depicted by its historians can be restricted to two broad myths or political formulas. There is, on the one hand, the Maronite idea of Lebanon as a *sui generis* national entity deeply rooted in its Phoenician past, and a cultural experience which transcends its Arab or Islamic surroundings. This formula assumes a variety of theoretical and historical constructions, depending on the background of a particular

<sup>2</sup>Similarly, Reid (1997) emphasizes the importance of Egyptology for Egyptian nationalism.

<sup>3</sup>See Haddad (1977, p. 18), who speaks of Lebanese nationalism as a Maronite separatism.

<sup>4</sup>Lammens' articles, published in the magazine of the faculty, *al-Mashriq*, were collected in a single publication in 1921. The work of Father Pierre Martin, dedicated to the ancient history of Mount Lebanon and the surrounding areas, was translated into Arabic and published in 1889, marking the beginning of the historical and archaeological series printed by the *Imprimerie catholique*.

historian, his general education and social position. The Muslim of Lebanon, on the other hand, looks at Lebanon as part of a larger whole, be it the Arab nation or geographical Syria. (Choueiri 1989, p. 122)

The idea of Phoenicia, according to which the modern Lebanon was the political and cultural heir of the ancient Phoenician civilization, in general offered a way to escape Arabism, which was too closely linked to Muslim issues. The myth of Phoenician origins, used by Lebanese nationalism, despite having different versions, was based on a general model.

The modern Lebanese, of Phoenician-Aramaic origin, are not part of the Arab ethnicity, their contribution to Western culture is priceless, their skills in commerce are incomparable, and their inherent national characteristics are wisdom and tranquillity. (Kaufmann 2001, pp. 174–175)

The emphasis on archaeology and on the idea of the “origin” belongs to a viewpoint on nation and history which is different to Hegel’s, who holds that modification and change are more important than origins and a kind of “purity.”<sup>5</sup> In this regard, I have already mentioned (Chapter 10) the observations of Strong about Hegel’s idea of “difference” and even conflict as positive factors of development.

The cultural and political role of the USJ was not limited to its contribution to Lebanese nationalism. Because of its connection to the French state and its economic dependence on it, the USJ was considered its representative, with the advantages and disadvantages thereby entailed. If it is true that the official recognition of diplomas by the French state made study at USJ more appealing and marked a point of advantage over its Protestant competitors, the dependency on France weighed on its educational policy and dictated its priorities, consisting mainly of the dissemination of French culture and language, while Catholic religion and its spread were left in the background.

The alliance of Catholic missionary enterprise with French diplomacy was a very important element of French imperial expansion. Spagnolo (1974, p. 563) speaks of a “particular style of imperialism,” which changed with the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. France had a longstanding presence in the Middle East alongside

<sup>5</sup>It can be noted the different importance given to the Phoenician people, who for Hegel ultimately belong to the past.

Catholics, and although the Ottoman Empire's modernization led to higher securities for Christian missions, the French protectorate of Catholics, a fundamental political instrument, was maintained. The Syrian mission of the Jesuits, "the most dynamic of the Catholic missions and one of the most French in composition" (p. 566), founded the USJ in 1880 (recognized by the Holy See in 1881). It is important to note that this happened in spite of the fact that in March 1880 the French republican government had taken anti-clerical measures, notably expelling the Jesuits from France. Yet the foreign minister, Charles de Freycinet, had promptly reassured the Catholic missions that the restrictions and even the closure of their activities in France would have no effect on the support that was given to them in the Ottoman Empire. As a justification, it was held that in backward areas like Syria, religion was still essential and that religious identification remained the dominant form of social identity, so it was necessary to keep this religious aspect. Yet, this sheds light on the fact that the system of Jesuit schools was seen as an important political and diplomatic tool, and that "to the Quai d'Orsay they were an instrument of foreign policy" (p. 566).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the French cultural policy in the Ottoman Empire was the emphasis on language. Both Left and Right parties agreed on the importance of the spread of French; the content of teaching tended to be considered less important than the fact that French not only was taught, but it was the language used for teaching.<sup>6</sup> In front of this requirement, even the distinction between Catholic and secular morality took second place, unlike what was happening in France. The policies of Gambetta and Ferry relied on the Catholic missionaries to spread French culture and French influence in Ottoman Syria, by supporting and financing abroad a congregation that had been suppressed inside France. In the nineteenth century, this cultural policy began to give back to France its role as a leading world power.

In this situation, although the Jesuits aimed at contributing through their work to the conversion of non-Catholics to the true faith, they were aware of having to downplay the religious aspect in deference to the more pressing needs of the mission, namely its nationalistic imperative: not only because the attention of French state was focused on

<sup>6</sup>See Burrows (1986, p. 128), who points out that in this context there was little attention to preserving the purity of the language, and the need for a simplified "exportable" French was identified.



the spread of French language and culture (in order to gain influence and power); but because the Jesuits needed to attract students from all the major religious groups of the Ottoman Empire if they wanted to continue to be financed from the French government, and this would have been impossible if they had focused only on Catholicism (see Zaka 2006).<sup>7</sup> In this way, the USJ has become an example of tolerance and of the possibility of overcoming the sectarian division which was held to be one of the biggest problems for Syria. Unlike the SPC, the USJ has had mandatory participation in religious ceremonies only since 1891 and only for Catholic students; they also adapted to the religious obligations of non-Catholic students, who, for example, were allowed to go home to celebrate their religious holidays. In this way, the educational policy of the USJ could meet not only French and Catholic interests, but also those of local students. All (graduates, students, and Jesuits) had to accept a theory of education based on the principles of the Third Republic: secular and focused on “morality,” based on French bourgeois sensibilities, which emphasized virtue, order, and obedience.<sup>8</sup> The philosophical references of this attitude may be found in Rousseau’s “civil religion” ([1762] 1994) and in the ideas of the Enlightenment and Deism (which can also be found in Rousseau’s *Emile* [1762] 1979—“the Creed of the Savoyard Priest”), and in general in the view of religion as simplified, “purified” by tradition and dogma. As noted above, this idea—which probably was the most suitable for the circumstances of the Western missionaries and educational institutions in the Ottoman Empire—is distant from Hegel’s view on religion.

From these brief remarks about USJ, it appears to occupy a place somewhat distant from the Hegelian position. The two contrasts that immediately catch the eye, German–French and Protestant–Catholic, are a sign of a more profound difference, which reflects different philosophical traditions. As seen above, Protestant–Catholic difference,

<sup>7</sup>In their internal correspondence, the Jesuits emphasized the missionary nature of their institution. See Zaka (2006, p. 126 ff.), who analyzes the documents in the archive of Vanves. There is, among others, the idea of Islam as an “ossifying” religion, which prevents the progress of civilization and the idea that one day the USJ would have made this “infection” disappear and promoted a new and better religiosity.

<sup>8</sup>See Zaka (2006, p. 109), who points out that from the foundation of the university until 1896 “Jesuits were unable and mostly unwilling to stress Catholicism in their educational curriculum.”

in Hegel's view, is a sign of a difference in the degree of "modernity" and freedom. In relation to the French–German difference, it must be noted first of all that French culture, from its modern roots in the French Revolution to its later development, represents a line of thought that has developed in parallel to the Hegelian one. Even if one grants that Hegel himself took philosophical and political contents from the French Revolution and the thought of the period, one cannot speak of derivation or direct influence. In addition, it is important to note that Hegel regards the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as "previous" stages in history (and history of philosophy) in respect to his thought. He does not agree with the view which gives primacy to French culture, which characterizes the educational policy of France and of USJ as its representative. This idea is clearly expressed by Guizot in his *History of Civilization in Europe*, with its statements on the primacy of France in the progress of civilization: "it is without vanity, I think, we may say that France has been the centre, the focus of European civilization" (Guizot [1828] 1899, p. 2). For Guizot there is something special in the "French genius," in its language, in ideas, which are more "popular" and easily communicated to the masses:

perspicuity, sociability, sympathy, are the peculiar characteristics of France, of her civilization, and it is these qualities which rendered her eminently fit to march at the very head of European civilization. (Guizot [1828] 1899, p. 3)

The belief in the primacy of French culture is an important difference from Hegel, who holds that the "Spirit" in the modern world passes from France and the French Revolution to Germany (Kant, German Idealism, and finally Hegel himself), a "passage" which—beyond simple nationalistic pride—has an important meaning for modern freedom's conquest, which for Hegel is not the "absolute freedom" (by his definition) of the French Revolution and of Rousseau's *Social Contract*.

These considerations show that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Arab world (particularly in Syria) ideas related to the thought of Hegel were present and circulating, although not explicitly, and that this presence is bound to American Protestant missionaries and their educational activity in the SPC. Even if only an indirect influence can be spoken of, and even filtered by steps that may involve interpretations and elaborations significant in some cases,

the presence of patterns or images in some way attributable to Hegel is very important to broaden the framework of the representations of “modernity,” the “West,” and the role of the Arabs in history which were available to the Arab thinkers in that period. These ideas, in fact, may have interacted with the Arab thought of the period, in particular with the formation of anti-Turkish thought and Arab nationalism, and the elaboration of the idea of “modernity” in one of its forms.

In Part III, I will deal with the direct reception of Hegel and the translations of his works into Arabic, which began in the second half of the twentieth century.

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PART III

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The Contemporary Reception



## The Direct Reception of Hegel as a Recent Phenomenon: Syria and Lebanon

**Abstract** This chapter addresses the contemporary reception of Hegel's thought in Syria and Lebanon. It focuses on the presence of works of Hegel and on his thought, translated or written in Arabic, in the major libraries (and bookshops) of Damascus and Beirut (according to the author's research conducted in Syria and Lebanon in 2009–2010). This information is presented and discussed, to better understand the characteristics of Hegel's reception.

**Keywords** Hegel · Translations in Arabic · Arab thought · Syria Lebanon · Reception · Influence

In Part II we saw, especially in the case of the American University of Beirut (AUB) and in its cultural policy, a vehicle of transmission of some Hegelian ideas in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Only in more recent times, however, has it been possible to speak of direct reception. In comparison to the reception of other Western, and in particular German, philosophers (such as Heidegger and Nietzsche), direct reception of Hegel started very late—traceable back to the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mohamed Turki (2008) tries to explain this delay for example by pointing out that Hegel's thought could not enter the Arab world through foreign universities, since Hegel was considered to be the philosopher of the Prussian state and hence excluded from

Since then, interest has grown and has led to the translation of many works, activity which is still underway.

The centers of the recent reception and translation of Hegel's thought are Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. In this chapter, I will focus on current activity in Syria and Lebanon, and on the presence of works of Hegel and on his thought, translated or written in Arabic, in the major libraries (and bookshops) of Damascus and Beirut.<sup>2</sup> A focus on translation is a good method of understanding the dynamics of reception, although its usefulness must not be overestimated. First of all, it must be observed that translations cannot shed light on the impact of the books in European languages. It can be affirmed that in libraries both in Syria and in Lebanon, Hegel's works in European languages are available<sup>3</sup> and most intellectuals have read Hegel in French, English, or the languages of Eastern Europe, as shown by citations and bibliographies of

university curricula of other countries. Moreover, the status of Western philosophy in general in the universities in the Arab world is also a consideration, because philosophy faculties were founded only during the twentieth century and still remain few in number (see p. 182). A third reason is Hegel's eurocentrism, exemplified in the exclusion of Oriental philosophy from the course of philosophy in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, since for Hegel philosophy properly begins in Greece, along with free self-consciousness (pp. 183–184). Hegel, however, tends to distinguish between the Orient and Islam, and for him only Chinese and Indian philosophies are properly "Oriental" (see Hegel [1840] 1963, I, p. 119), while Arab philosophy is fully included in the development of the history of philosophy.

<sup>2</sup>Here I am presenting and discussing the results of research I have conducted in Syria and Lebanon in 2009 and 2010. The main libraries I visited are: the "al-Asad" National Library; the Library of Higher Studies at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Damascus; the Library of the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Syria; and the libraries of the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. At the time of this research Syria was only slowly providing online telematic catalogues, so search on site was necessary; while Lebanese university library catalogues were already available on the Internet.

<sup>3</sup>A look at the catalogue of the "al-Asad" National Library shows that some works by Hegel are present both in English and French: the *Philosophy of Right* (1940, 1952a); the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1945, 1952b); and separately, *The Reason in History* (*Introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History*) (1953, 1965). Other works are only in French: the *Aesthetics* (1979); the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1954), *Jena's Logic and Metaphysics* (1980); *Philosophical Propaedeutic* (1963); the article on *Natural Law* (1972); and anthology of selected writings (1939), which consists of a selection of very short texts, organized so as to illustrate Hegel's thought. It should be noted that in general I am not considering translations into Russian and other Eastern European languages.

their studies on Hegel's thought. This aspect of Hegel's reception is destined to remain at least partly "submerged," because of course many texts may have been consulted abroad or in the authors' personal libraries. Moreover, there were less apparent ways of spreading knowledge of Hegel's ideas, such as books on the history of Western philosophy. One very well-known and widespread publication, which is often used as a textbook, is Yūsuf Karam's<sup>4</sup> *History of Modern Philosophy* (*Tārīkh al-falsafa al-hadītha*), the first edition of which dates back to 1949.

A number of Hegel's works have been translated into Arabic. It is not always possible to specify their source, so I will not focus on this aspect, although it is possible to observe that generally, translations are not made from the German text. Although the availability of texts in languages other than Arabic makes translations less noteworthy, the *decision* to translate is very significant and shows that the interest in Hegel's philosophy at a certain point was no longer restricted to a narrow circle of intellectuals, but had become a more general phenomenon, or at least that publishers and their advisers aspired it to become so. This—as I will show—can be connected to its political importance, 'revolutionary' in the Socialist-Marxist meaning, which entails the participation and self-consciousness of the masses.

As noted above, the translations in Arabic are quite recent. The translations of the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Hegel 1974a), the first part of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1974b), the *Aesthetics* (Hegel 1978–1981),<sup>5</sup> and the *Selected Writings* (Hegel 1978) date back to the 1970s and early 1980s, together with a new translation of the *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Hegel 1981a) and a partial translation of the *Phenomenology of Mind/ Spirit* (up to the chapter on "Self-consciousness"), which was published with two different titles in two different geographic areas of the Arab world (Hegel 1981b, c). The *Life of Jesus* (Hegel 1984a), the second part of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1984b), the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Hegel 1985), and the first part of the *Lectures on the History of*

<sup>4</sup>Yūsuf Karam (1886–1959) studied philosophy in France with Jacques Maritain and is a representative of "moderate rationalism." In his book he considers the visions of the various thinkers, and adds his point of view.

<sup>5</sup>*Aesthetics* or the *Lectures on Fine Art* has been divided into different parts, translated separately between 1978 and 1981. All translations are edited by Jūrj Tarābīshī and published by Dār al-talī'a, Beirut.



*Philosophy* (Hegel 1986) were translated in the mid-1980s. The *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* were translated between 2001 and 2004 (Hegel 2001–2004). In the mid-2000s the complete translations of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 2006), the *Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit* (Hegel 2008), and *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (Hegel 2007) were published.

One interesting phenomenon to be considered is that some of the European-language studies of Hegel's thought were translated into Arabic before Hegel's works. Excepting *Hegel: sa vie, son oeuvre avec un expose de sa philosophie*, by André Cresson and René Serreau, which was translated in 1955 (Cresson and Serreau [1949] 1955), many translations were made in the 1970s. Notable volumes included the *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History* by Jean Hyppolite ([1948] 1969), *Hegel* by François Châtelet (1970—translated by George Saddiqnī, who also translated *Studies on Marx and Hegel* by Hyppolite in 1981), and *La Pensée de Hegel* by Roger Garaudy ([1966] 1973—translated by Ilyās Murqus). The translation of *The Philosophy of Hegel: A Systematic Exposition* by Walter Stace has had several editions since the first 1970 translation by Imām 'Abd al-Fattāh Imām. At the end of the 1970s *Logique formelle, logique dialectique* by Henri Lefebvre (1978) and *Reason and Revolution* by Herbert Marcuse ([1941] 1979) were translated (Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology* was translated in 1984). In the 1980s and 1990s Bernard Bourgeois ([1969] 1981), Karl Löwith (1988), Eric Weil [1950] (1986), René Serreau ([1968] 1993), and Francis Fukuyama (1993), among others, were translated. In 2001 the translation of *A Hegel Dictionary* by Michael Inwood ([1993] 2001) by Imām 'Abd al-Fattāh Imām was released.

There are also many studies in Arabic on Hegel. Chronologically, the first is that of Hanān Dimiyān on the evidence of God's existence, a degree thesis from 1953.<sup>6</sup> Some studies date back to the 1960s, such as a series of articles by Mujāhid 'Abd al-Mun'im Mujāhid in the Lebanese magazine "*al-Ādāb*" (see Ghālī 2000, p. 4) and Zakariyā Ibrāhīm's (1966) work on Hegel's political philosophy. The September 1970 issue of the magazine *Al-Fikr al-mu'āsir*, published in Cairo under the leadership of Fu'ād Zakariyā, is dedicated to "Hegel in the Twentieth Century." On the bicentennial of Hegel's birth, it showed an

<sup>6</sup>This work pre-dates the establishment of the University of Damascus and is available in the "al-Asad" National Library.

interest that was destined to grow. Among the articles are “Hegel and Contemporary Thought” by Hasan Hanafī ([1970] 1982—to which I will return later), “Lenin’s Reading of Hegel” by Dimitri Adīb, and “Hegelian Revolution” by Yahyà Hawīdī. Imām ‘Abd al-Fattah Imām, the prominent Egyptian scholar and Hegel expert, responsible for many translations and studies, published, among other works, the study *The Dialectical Method in Hegel* in 1969 and *Hegelian Studies* in 1984.<sup>7</sup> In 1970 *Hegel or Absolute Idealism* by Zakariyā Ibrāhīm was published. A very important author in the Syrian and international context is undoubtedly Yūsuf Salāma, with his studies *The Concept of Negation in Hegel* (2001) and *From Negation to Utopia. A Study on Hegel and Marcuse* (2008).<sup>8</sup> Many works are devoted to political topics and philosophy of history: *The People and History: Hegel* by Ismā‘īl Husayn Nāzī (1976),<sup>9</sup> *Hegel: Fortress of Freedom* by Mujāhid ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Mujāhid (1985); Munīra Muhammad’s Ph.D. thesis on Hegel’s philosophy of history (1993); and the degree thesis of Munā al-Naqshbandī, titled “Nationalism and Religion in Hegel and in Arabic Thought” (2000)<sup>10</sup>; finally, there is the recent work *The End of Philosophy. A Study on Hegel’s Thought* by Wā‘il Ghālī (2000) and the degree thesis on Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, by Rūzīt Hasan Shaykh Mūsā (2007). Hannā Dīb’s (1994) *Hegel and Feuerbach* can also be counted among these works. A recent work on a logic-theoretical field is that of ‘Abd-Allah al-Nisr, *The Problem of Antinomies Between Kant and Hegel* (2002), indicative of the “new course” in the approach to Hegel, started by Yūsuf Salāma.<sup>11</sup>

In Lebanon, there is a great concentration of major universities, including the AUB and the University of Saint-Joseph (USJ), foreign institutions with a long presence in the area. The link between these universities and Western countries makes the cultural debate at least partially

<sup>7</sup>This book (Imām 1984, pp. 386–405) includes a German–English–Arabic glossary of the main terms used by Hegel.

<sup>8</sup>Salāma is of Palestinian origin, but for years he has lived and worked in Syria. During this research he was teaching at Damascus Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO).

<sup>9</sup>Nāzī, studied at the Sorbonne and taught in Cairo. Starting from Hegel’s positions on world history, his work comes to outline the traits of the “Egyptian spirit (*rūh*).”

<sup>10</sup>This is an unpublished work, kindly granted from the author. Al-Naqshbandī is Syrian, and her thesis is recorded in the archives of the University of Damascus, despite being officially held at the University of Baghdad.

<sup>11</sup>This is the degree thesis by al-Nisr, held in Damascus University 1997, under the supervision of Salāma, who wrote the Introduction.

linked to these countries and this has implications for the material available, which is abundant and very up-to-date, and on topics at the center of interest. In particular, with regard to Hegel's work and secondary literature in European languages, one can count on the presence of numerous up-to-date publications, which can be found in Beirut, as in any Western city. These works are in English or French, but only rarely in German. There are some essays in Arabic on Hegel's thought which are not easily available in Syria, including *Falsafa al-hadātha fī fikr Hegel* by Muhammad al-Shaykh (2008); *East-West Dualism* by 'Afif Farrāj (2008), who compares six philosophical positions between East and West, including Hegel's; *History and the State: Between Ibn Khaldūn and Hegel* by Husayn Hindāwī (1996); *Heidegger versus Hegel* by 'Abd al-Salām bin 'Abd al-'Alī (1985)<sup>12</sup>; and *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* by Mahmūd Shurayh (1985b).<sup>13</sup>

The presence of a large number of works by and about Hegel in Lebanese universities does not allow conclusions to be drawn on the importance and influence of his thought in Lebanon, because a large section on Hegel is required in any Western-like philosophical library. In order to evaluate the influence and interest in Hegelian thought in the Lebanese cultural context, it is very useful to survey graduate and doctoral theses. Valuable tools for this purpose are the *Index Libanicus* (1982), which covers the period from 1906 to 1980, the lists of theses and thesis projects of the AUB (1971, 1993, 1994), as well as the catalogues of the libraries of the various universities in Lebanon. There are only three dissertations on Hegel in English at the AUB, dating back to periods which are distant from one another (Gordon 1951; Shurayh 1985a; Haj-Isma'il 1997); in addition, there are two doctoral dissertations (*thèse pour un Doctorat*) from the Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik (Zoghbi 1986; Farès 2000); three degree theses from the Université Saint-Joseph (Baaklini 1973; Boustani 1973; Samaha 1995); and finally, eight "mémoires" in French between Lebanese University and Université

<sup>12</sup>It is also worth mentioning the article by Fathi al-Maskīn "The Philosophy of the Last God: Heidegger in Front of Hegel" (2003), issued in the Lebanese periodical *Al-fikr al-'arabī al-mu'āsir* (*Contemporary Arabic Thought*).

<sup>13</sup>Despite the subtitle in German: "Zusammenfassung von Hegels Phänomenologie und Kommentar zu Hegels Philosophie in arabischer Sprache," Mahmūd Shurayh uses as sources the English translations of Baillie (Hegel [1807] 1967) and Miller (Hegel [1807] 1977).

Saint-Esprit-Kaslik.<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that the surveyed material does not include any study in Arabic. Among the “mémoires” in French written at the Lebanese University in 1971, two have the same supervisor, Dr. Nayef Maalouf. One of them however, does not focus in particular on Hegel, but on German Idealism in general. For the rest, this brief survey shows that graduate and doctorate studies on Hegel are sporadic and produced under the guidance of different supervisors. From this overview, it emerges above all that there are links with currents of thought in vogue from time to time in the West, such as existentialism and hermeneutics, and a lack of a “school,” or at least some continuity of interest in Hegel.

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<sup>14</sup>These theses are less important than Masters theses, and for this reason in some cases the author’s name is even omitted. There are those for CAPES (Certificate of Professional Aptitude for Secondary Teaching), for the DES (Diplôme d’Études Supérieures), for the DEA (Diplôme d’Études Approfondies) or for the Licence. At the Lebanese University: E. Dbeis, *La conception de l’Etat chez Hegel et sa critique par Marx* (1961); S. Aouad, *La mort: sa signification chez Hegel et Heidegger* (1971); A. Chehade, *L’idéalisme allemand et la révolution française* (1971). At the Université Saint-Esprit-Kaslik (USEK): E. H. Khalil, *Conscience et aliénation. Etudes Hégéliennes* (1977); the other studies are listed without author’s name: *La réalisation de la liberté dans le droit Hegelien* (1985); *La philosophie de l’Histoire chez Hegel* (1987); *La liberté dans la pensée politique de Hegel* (1992); *Violence et reconnaissance dans la pensée de Hegel* (1997).

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## Hegel Today: Conversations with Yūsuf Salāma and Josef Ma‘alūf

**Abstract** A very important element to determine the value and significance attributed to Hegel’s thought in the present Arab world is represented by the views of contemporary Arab scholars. The main points from my conversations with Yūsuf Salāma and Josef Ma‘alūf in 2009 and 2010, two prominent figures of the academic and cultural context in Syria and Lebanon, are reported in this chapter.

**Keywords** Hegel · Contemporary Arab thought · Orientalism · Islam Arab philosophy

A very important element to determine the value and significance attributed to Hegel’s thought in the present Arab world is represented by the views of contemporary Arab scholars. For this reason, in addition to the bibliographic research, I have collected opinions of important scholars and thinkers in Damascus and Beirut. In the following pages, I recall and summarize their essential points, as they are useful in giving an up-to-date idea of the situation and in showing an example of the different intellectual orientations that may be taken in relation to Hegel’s philosophy today. The questions addressed are very similar and focus on the knowledge and influence of Hegel’s thought in the Arab world. Additionally, the various scholars have been asked for an opinion on Hegel’s philosophy in general and an assessment of Hegel’s positions toward the East, the Arab world, and Islam.

At the time of my conversations with him, Yūsuf Salāma<sup>1</sup> was a Professor at Damascus's Institut Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO). He represents an "inner" view on Hegel's philosophy, being properly a Hegelian expert. He studied in Egypt, with thinkers like Hasan Hanafi and Zakariyā Ibrāhīm, and before IFPO had taught at the University of Damascus.

According to Salāma, the fact that Hegel's influence in *Bilād al-Shām* (the Arab name of Ottoman Syria) did not start early is due to the fact that in the nineteenth century it was mainly books by French and Enlightenment philosophers that were translated, and after independence from France, the main interests were politics and economics, which were addressed by other thinkers. Political thinking was influenced more by other types of philosophy than Hegel's, such as Bergson who, focusing on spirituality and creativity, was able to respond better and more immediately to the demands of liberation and affirmation of the Arab world. Hegel is a rationalist and very difficult to read, so is less suitable to influence the masses. One of the most important and influential thinkers is Marx. Salāma points out that Hegel, because of his being interpreted through Marx, on one hand is condemned as an "idealist," on the other he is appreciated as the inventor of dialectics. Only later did the thinkers start to verify whether the general views about Hegel actually corresponded to Hegel's ideas, and turn to his work, beginning a field of research that focused on Hegel himself, not filtered through Marx and Marxism. Exponents of religious thought do not know Hegel directly and criticize him together with Marx for his materialist dialectics, as in the case of the Syrian al-Būtī (to whom I will return later). Salāma feels that contemporary Islamic thought is too traditionalist, Aristotelian, and "medieval" (from the point of view of its field of interest) for being interested in Hegel.

Considering Hegel's view of Islam, Salāma observes that the lack of consideration of Islam in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* ([1832] 1895) is attributable to the quality of the material and information available to him. He believes that if Hegel had had more information, he would have had a different opinion. Salāma distinguishes Hegel's claims on the East from those on Arab philosophy. With regard to the East, particularly in reference to the lack of freedom, Hegel is

<sup>1</sup>The main points from my conversations with Yūsuf Salāma on April 4, 2009, May 17, 2009, and April 22, 2010 in Damascus are reported here.

not completely wrong, especially when looking at religious life, which is reflected in the social one. However, whomever criticizes Hegel for his statements about the East probably did not read them directly and is either merely relying on concepts taken from French and English works on the topic, or s/he knows Hegel through Marx (Marx's claims about "Oriental despotism," however, are not noticed or are in some way justified). According to Salāma, Hegel's philosophy of history simply follows a method (to divide in parts, phases) without which it would be impossible to write history. It does not make much sense to speak of a proper "Orientalism" of Hegel, because in his time this cultural attitude had not yet been fully affirmed, although it should be said that in the pages of his work there is a detectable influence of some typically "Orientalist" ideas, especially in the consideration of Islam in the Middle East. In relation to Arab philosophy, Hegel made a mistake in saying that it did not represent progress for philosophy, probably because he did not have the necessary information to be able to evaluate it.

Salāma emphasizes the lack of a true school of thought that refers to Hegel's philosophy and considers himself to be an isolated presence, especially in Damascus,<sup>2</sup> despite his former students producing studies on Hegel (such as Muhammad 1993). In the end, for Yūsuf Salāma, Hegel is "the philosopher of the philosophers," since his philosophy has the potential to be revived and updated in all ages and many of his ideas are still valid and fertile, such as his consideration of history and his method.

At the time of this interview, Josef Ma'alūf<sup>3</sup> was responsible for the Department of Philosophy and Master of the Lebanese University in Beirut, as well as head of the Ph.D. School to which all Lebanese universities refer. He taught Ethics and History of philosophy and held lessons on Hegel's thought.

According to Ma'alūf, the situation of Hegelian studies in Lebanon is very disappointing. He attributes this deficiency mainly to the difficulties of language, since there are deeply different cultural horizons involved, which are very difficult, if not impossible, to translate. Even very recent translations are often inadequate, as in the case of the latest

<sup>2</sup>He is thinking of the Egyptians, Zakariyā Ibrāhīm and Hasan Hanafi, who supervised his doctoral thesis in Egypt.

<sup>3</sup>The main points from my conversations with Josef Ma'alūf on 15 April 15, 2010 in Beirut are reported here.

translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 2006), and are often translated from English, as in the case of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1974, 1984). It is not really a question of the translator, but rather of the difficulty of the text, especially if taken from German. For example, the term “*al-mithāliya*,” the ideal, is not the correct translation for “idealism” and is not clear, but the problem lies precisely in the lack of a suitable term. Referring to his experience as a teacher on the Lebanese University Masters courses, where he teaches courses about German idealism and Hegel, he notes that even when Hegel’s ideas are well understood, teaching cannot go beyond a mere general and superficial presentation, because students are not prepared to understand his philosophy.

Ma‘alūf points out that Hegel’s philosophy of history cannot be anything but appreciated, but only when students are given the conceptual instruments to understand it properly, as is the case with his students.<sup>4</sup> Yet thinkers often dwell on a Marxist view of the historical movement and of the Arab world, and they do not always sufficiently clarify that for Hegel, Islam is a “past” and it has given what it had to give.

On Hegel’s influence on Arabic thought, according to Ma‘alūf, it is “still scarce.” So far, the most important authors for the Arab world have been Marx (and Marxism) and Nietzsche. Intellectuals know Hegel’s ideas very well, but in society and in everyday life there is no trace of them, because there is a different way of thinking, which is “Islamic.” Scholars, even those who study in Europe, are not much listened to. Moreover, there are objective difficulties, due to the scarcity of readers prepared for such complex arguments. It is not always possible to simplify Hegel, so, despite many studies, his influence is not noticeable. For Ma‘alūf, this is a great loss because he believes that Hegel could help Lebanese (and Arab in general) thinkers to develop a critical approach to their history, to relativize Islam as a religion among others and above all to conceptually develop the discourse on dialogue-recognition between diversities, which is much needed, especially in Lebanon and in the

<sup>4</sup>In this regard, Munīra Muhammad’s remarks (conversation with the author, Damascus May 5, 2009) about her teaching experience are interesting. In her Ph.D. thesis (1993) she dealt with Hegel’s philosophy of history, which is currently the subject of some of her courses at the University of Damascus. Reflecting on her lessons she notes that getting to know the aspect of Hegel’s philosophy addressing the non-European world causes great surprise among her students, because they do not expect this kind of ideas (which they refuse) from such a great philosopher.

Muslim world in general. In fact, he believes that understanding Hegel can help to learn acceptance of the “other.”

Ma‘alūf believes that Hegel was not at all totalitarian and that the master-slave dialectic did not describe his idea, but the conflict that is present in history. For Hegel, history is conflict, power, not love, but he has also developed an important idea of “recognition,” which is at the center of recent studies. Ma‘alūf’s remarks can be connected to the interest in the themes at the core of current Western debate, and to the marginalization of Marxism and historicism, which characterizes Lebanese cultural context.

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## CHAPTER 15

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# Conversations with Ahmad Barqāwī and George Saddiqnī

**Abstract** In this chapter the main points from my conversations about Hegel's thought with Ahmad Barqāwī and George Saddiqnī, two prominent figures of the academic and cultural context in the area, held in 2009, are reported. These are a useful tool in giving an up-to-date idea of the situation and showing an example of the different intellectual orientations that may be taken in relation to Hegel's philosophy in the present.

**Keywords** Hegel · Contemporary Arab thought · Orientalism  
Islam · Nationalism

Ahmad Barqāwī,<sup>1</sup> Professor at the University of Damascus, a historian of modern Arab ideas and thought, when assessing the reception of Hegel's thought in Syria–Lebanon, observes, like Salāma, that Hegel was not translated into Arabic because practical economic, and political demands pushed the approach of other, more radical philosophers, such as Nietzsche, and because of the primacy of French philosophy. He adds some interesting remarks about Hegel's influence on nationalism: unlike the case in Egypt, which is also characterized by a strong patriotic

<sup>1</sup>The main points from my conversations with Ahmad Barqāwī, on May 15, 2009 in Damascus are reported here.

nationalism (*watanī*),<sup>2</sup> the nationalism spread in *Bilād al-Shām*<sup>3</sup> was either Arab nationalism in general or that of “great Syria” (*qawmī*). For this reason, in Syria there was some interest in German philosophy, such as Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation* ([1808] 2008), which were translated. Traces of Hegel’s views about the people and the state can be found in Syrian and Arab nationalism (panarabism). Hegel is the philosopher of the state (*dawla*) par excellence, combining state-ism with nationalism, and focusing on the people, in the sense of the “*umma*.” In fact, for him “a people” is a group which concretely shares deep historical ties, and the state is an entity corresponding to it, such as, for example, the German state for the Germans.

Yet, Marxism played the main role in the reception of Hegel’s thought. Marxism has reinterpreted Hegel’s philosophy, which has come to Syria through Marxist thinkers: had it not been for Marx we would not have Hegel. Barqāwī underlines the debt that the Syrian reception of Hegel owes to Soviet Marxism, characterized by the critique of Hegel as an idealist and by the need for the turning upside-down of his dialectics. On the other hand, he also points out that the interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy in Syria has distanced itself from this imprint and has taken its own course, both in universities, where there are scholars interested in Hegel’s philosophy taken for itself (such as Yūsuf Salāma and Munīra Muḥammad), and in the Marxist field. In fact, he points out that some Marxist thinkers have understood the “Notion” for Hegel in its genuinely dialectical and revolutionary meaning (as in the case of Ilyās Murqus—to whom I will return later): they have understood the centrality of dialectics, distinguishing themselves both from the positions considering Hegel as a pure idealist, and from those considering him as materialist. In fact, he is not just an idealist philosopher, but a dialectical philosopher. The idea that Hegel is an idealist philosopher in an abstract sense, and that his philosophy is to be inverted is a widespread image in the Arab world anyway. Many Arab thinkers did not bother to study Hegel and understand it, but moved on the path already outlined by the Soviet interpretation.

Barqāwī points out that in the Arab world there is not a real current of thought that follows Hegel’s philosophy, because there is a greater

<sup>2</sup> Patriotism is linked to the territorial element and ideas of the French Revolution.

<sup>3</sup> *Bilād al-Shām*: the medieval Caliphate province of the eastern Mediterranean, or Western Mesopotamia and the Levant. Modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Jordan.



need for other philosophers who speak of freedom. In this sense, it can be said that Hegel's thought is not suitable for the problems of the Arabs, who need someone who directly defends freedom, instead of using too-complicated arguments like those of Hegel. For this reason, he is known and appreciated mainly at the academic level and the effect of his ideas on Arab thought is weaker than that of other philosophers. In general, he is little present in contemporary Arab thought. Moreover, although at present his thought is not at the center of international interest it should not to be excluded—if there was a “revival” of interest in Hegel in the Western world, Arab culture would participate in it.

According to Barqāwī, Hegel offers good arguments for “Orientalism,” by affirming that Arab philosophers have not produced anything new, that there is no freedom among Arabs, and that they are not rational. Given these evaluations, one cannot expect the Arabs to easily accept this aspect of his philosophy, and perhaps this is also another reason why it is not very widely studied or read in the Arab world. He is, none the less, a great philosopher, who never diminishes.

As far as Hegel's view of Islam is concerned, Barqāwī doubts that many are aware of it. Surely the Hegelian vision of Islam is consistent with his conception of the development of the Spirit, which (according to Barqāwī's description) progressively liberates itself from the sensible and representative elements to reach absolute Knowing. Hegel, like Christianity, thinks of a Spirit, which is “light” and not made heavy by matter, while Islam is a religion of everyday life (“eat, drink, get married”).<sup>4</sup> For this reason, Hegel sees Islam as a religion still tied to the “material” aspect. Barqāwī is a representative of secular thought and emphasizes the difference between philosophy and theology: philosophy, unlike theology, does not rely on revelation but is an exercise of the mind. Therefore, the great difference is not between Islam and philosophy, but between philosophy and revealed religions, which do not accept the need to confront philosophy. Islamic (but also Christian) thinkers reject Hegel, mainly because there is no possibility of dialogue between the two positions, and on the basis of a rejection of Marxism and dialectics.

<sup>4</sup>Barqāwī observes that Sufism, Islamic mysticism, in this frame represents a new way inside Islam and a shift from the main line.

George Saddiqnī<sup>5</sup> has studied and taught philosophy at the University of Damascus. In this field he is well-known for his translation of *Hegel* by François Châtelet in 1970 and *Studies on Marx and Hegel* by Jean Hyppolite in 1981. He had to interrupt this activity for his commitment in politics, as a prominent member and activist of the Ba'th Party. In the past he has been Minister of Information<sup>6</sup> and he is currently directing the newspaper *al-Ba'th*. According to Saddiqnī, if Hegel did have any influence on Arab thought, it was only in the strictly academic sphere and did not reach the sphere of society and politics, whereas Marx had influence on all spheres, though subject to considerable misunderstanding. In fact, Saddiqnī contends, Marx's thought is studied superficially. The difference between Hegel and Marx is based on their conflicting views of the relationship between ideal and reality. Marx wants man to free himself, and he wants the ideal to be realized in reality, as paradise on earth. In general, Arabs misunderstood Marx and Hegel because they did not understand dialectics, although there are also dialectical elements in the Koran. However, there are Arab thinkers of distinction. As an example of someone who understood Hegel, Saddiqnī nominates Badi' al-Kasem, who was his philosophy teacher at the university in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

According to Saddiqnī, it is difficult to argue that Arab nationalism was influenced by Hegel's thought. Originating in Lebanon, Arab nationalism was at first an anti-Turkish movement. It could only arise in this area because North Africa was characterized by the religious ties between Muslims (ethnic ties being weaker, because both Arab and Berber ethnicities lived in this area) and Egypt was focused on the struggle with the British. It should be noted that Saddiqnī, when characterizing the first rise of nationalism as an anti-Turkish movement, refers to phenomena dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century, while Barqāwī also refers to the nationalism of the mid-twentieth century, which is believed to have been influenced by Fichte and German Romanticism among other ideas (see Chapter 6, note 8).

<sup>5</sup>The essential points of my conversation with George Saddiqnī on May 11, 2009, in Damascus are reported here.

<sup>6</sup>Patrick Seale (1989, p. 171) mentions him as a party ideologue and Minister of Information during the October War in 1973.

<sup>7</sup>As far as I know, his published studies are not easily available. Some pages from his university lessons kindly provided by Saddiqnī did not concern Hegel's thinking.

For Saddiqnī, despite the criticisms that have been made of Hegel's stance on religion, it cannot be successfully argued that Hegel's writing denigrated Islam or that he ever intended to denigrate it.

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## Hegel's Philosophy of History and the Thought of Nadrah al-Yāzajī

**Abstract** This chapter deals with the relationship and similarities between the thought of the Syrian writer and thinker Nadrah al-Yāzajī and Hegel's views, especially about the view of history and the role of peoples in it. It also considers the views about this topic expressed by al-Yāzajī in a written interview with him in 2010.

**Keywords** Hegel · Contemporary Arab thought  
Philosophy of history · World history · Progress · Spirit

The writer and thinker Nadrah al-Yāzajī is undoubtedly a very interesting Syrian intellectual. He has written on the philosophy of religion and of history, and on other topics, but although he knows Hegel's thought, he does not make any direct and particular reference to it in his work. In his expositions, the themes seen in the earlier part of this research regarding the vision of history and role of nations seem to re-emerge. For this reason, his position on these issues can be taken as an illustration of the link between views emerging in the previous period, especially in relation to the American Protestant missionaries, and in the present period. In his *Trans-cultural Understanding or Varieties of Cultures and Oneness of Human Thought* (al-Yāzajī, n.d.), he summarizes his thoughts and speaks of a unique progressive movement of cultures, which is the movement of the *logos*, incarnated from time to time by a different "leader" nation. The pattern is that of the unity of diversity, as he claims the existence of

a “diversity in Oneness and Oneness through diversity” and believes that “all cultures, with their different attributes, are expressions of one humanity” (p. 23). In this picture, the various aspects of thought are nothing but “interpretations of One perennial Wisdom” (p. 23). Cultures, present and past, are like tributaries of the only river of human culture, and the ancient and modern nations have always contributed to the development of this single human culture, particularly in the field of education.

So, various cultures represent one bundle of diverse, variant and multiform flowers and roses whose splendour glitters in the beauty of variety and multiplicity. (al-Yāzajī, n.d., p. 13)

This variety and multiplicity is not something static and dispersive: it flows into the development of a single ideal. The truth, in fact, is one, and every culture in human history represents a flashlight that illuminates the road and seeks to realize that archetypal form represented by the *logos*, “the unity underlying the wholeness of mankind, and the personified representations of the Spirit in history” (p. 13). The reference to “Spirit” in this case is something more than casual. The next sentence reveals a profound affinity to the scheme of Hegel’s philosophy of history:

When culture comes to its full consummation, thus fulfilling the will of the Logos, reaping its own crop, and attaining the summit of its achievement, its torch-light, by which its illumination has been glowing, is transferred to another culture, so that the Logos-Spirit (or Form) fulfils its cosmic and ultimate teleological end and continues its pilgrimage and itinerary through natural and human history. (al-Yāzajī, n.d., pp. 13–14)

The mechanism of the general course of history and culture, is close to that described by Hegel; similarly, the causes of the possible blockage of this course, which lie in individualism and closure in one’s particularity, are very similar to Hegel’s. The mechanism that enables mankind’s progress is based on sharing and transmitting, whereas what stops that progress is the attitude of nations which stay closed in themselves and refuse to transmit their culture to other nations, ignoring their own responsibilities.

Behaving in such manner, the egoistic nation delays the progress of humanity towards a higher plane of consciousness. (al-Yāzajī, n.d., p. 15)

“Progress” is meant in its spiritual meaning, as progress towards a higher level of awareness, and not in the materialistic sense. With its closure in itself, which is an attitude of superiority, the nation and its culture meet a destiny which is very similar to the one of the “Beautiful Soul” of the *Phenomenology of Mind/Spirit* (Hegel [1807] 1931).<sup>1</sup> It “fades away, degenerates and declines” (al-Yāzajī, n.d., p. 15). On a global scale in this case, barbarism prevails, and there is a kind of “crystallization” which is false, empty, and different from the positive crystallization. This consists of a culture overcoming its transience: “real crystallization is an indication that culture is not transitory, but classical, corresponding to the universal wholeness” (p. 16). Between the two modes of preservation, the first is just an appearance, since it is a fixing “against” the universal movement. This incessant movement and the fact that closure in self-sufficiency is destined to failure, show affinities to Hegel’s thought, even from the point of view of formal structures.

The idea of a progressive movement of history also characterizes some of the visions considered in the previous part of this research, as well as the insistence on the destiny and role of nations in the progress of humanity. It should be noted here that this is something other than a succession based on cultural and technical-scientific superiority: rather, it is a succession in interpreting a role that benefits an element common to all humanity, which is the “Spirit.” This is very similar to Hegel’s view, as it means “Absolute Knowing,” which is a self-consciousness that is also freedom. The idea is that the nation which, for a time, has a leading role, also has a task and that, once it has done this, it—even if it manages to preserve itself and to “crystallize”—will inevitably have nothing to give and will have to pass the “torch” (as seen above, Hegel speaks in this case of “natural death”). Al-Yāzajī speaks of two dimensions, one horizontal and one perpendicular, which must both be present. In fact, as well as the horizontal dimension of movement, the succession in the course of history and the territorial conquest, the perpendicular dimension is important, as it represents universality.

So, we know that historical movements and expansion which extended to distant foreign countries, regressed to their previous position because they

<sup>1</sup>The “Beautiful Soul” “vanishes as a shapeless vapour dissolving into thin air” (Hegel [1807] 1931, p. 667). It faces a destiny of “consumption” (p. 676) because it refuses to communicate and share.

had disregarded their perpendicular dimension. The perpendicular distinctive aspect of culture is known for its slow externalization, crossing the artificial borders, and overcoming man-made barriers and impediments. In this way, philosophies spread throughout the world, ideas were diffused in all directions, and universality prevailed. (al-Yāzajī, n.d., p. 18)

The idea that there is only one movement and a single “spiritual” purpose (awareness and freedom) is also similar to the American Protestant thought about history seen in Part II. These positions seem to start from the “peak” achieved by the movement described by Hegel and carry it forward. It can be assumed that al-Yāzajī has built his own vision on this point not only by referring to Hegel’s philosophy, but also to a widespread “cultural climate” which mainly concerns the role of nations in the advancement of awareness and freedom. Indeed, although there are various points that can be linked to Hegel’s ideas, al-Yāzajī does not explicitly refer to Hegel.<sup>2</sup>

To give a broader idea of his intellectual position, I report the main points of a written interview (handwritten and in English), which followed my conversation with al-Yāzajī (2010). This document shows the broadness of his reflections and reflects—albeit indirectly—the peculiarity of Syria from the point of view of the coexistence established between different religious confessions, where—as may also be seen in the statements of Barqāwī (Chapter 15)—the important distinction is between those who are religious and those who are not. Al-Yāzajī, a Christian thinker, does not set Islam and Christianity in opposition.<sup>3</sup>

For al-Yāzajī, Hegel’s (together with Spengler’s and Toynbee’s) main contribution to philosophy, valid and important today, is the fact that they have recognized “the efficacy of the Spectrum of Consciousness as the sole principle in history.” They have represented it as “the spiritual river of Human history with its tributaries considered

<sup>2</sup>This is also confirmed by the author himself, who, regarding his philosophical formation, mentions Hegel together with other great names, such as Spengler and Toynbee, without giving him a prominent role (conversation with the author, Damascus, March 23, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>Clearly, I am referring to the situation in Syria prior to the current conflict. Nevertheless, even in recent events, it can be recognized that Syria has not sunk blindly into a sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, nor between Christians and Muslims. In the areas still controlled by the state, national unity and solidarity between confessions is a strong point on which representatives of various religious beliefs insist.

as different cultures pouring their manifested achievements into it.” This position is very different from that of Arab Islamic thought, which is a “perpendicular” view of history, refusing the perspective of the “spiritual river” and of the progressive movement. It “rejects the previous historical achievements and a cultural human and elaborated deeds anterior to its established dogmatic faith” and also refuses to “believe in the possibility of the emergence of a new era that will surpass its perpendicular stagnation.” For this reason, it “has never been influenced by Hegel’s or Spengler’s interpretation of history and philosophy.” When asked about the affinities between Hegel’s ideas and his, he points out that “There is an obvious resemblance between Hegel’s philosophy and my own in the field of philosophy and history.” He affirms that he “could not admit” however “the embodiment of his [Hegel’s] great and superb philosophy in politics,” which is the reason why politicians have “badly interpreted” his idealism, similar to the way that the Bolsheviks distorted Marx’s. In his view, the Arab thinker who best understood Hegel’s philosophy is ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, the Egyptian thinker “who introduced and even explained the philosophy of Hegel in all its dimensions.”

In al-Yāzajī’s view too, Hegel appears to be a philosopher of freedom. He speaks about this aspect in particular when asked about the relationship between Hegel’s thought and Christianity. In fact, al-Yāzajī affirms that “Hegel’s philosophy and Christianity have or share the same ideal. Just as Christianity teaches man to be a free person with no restrictions or bonds in order to be perfect, so Hegel’s philosophy is an appeal to freedom.”<sup>4</sup> This freedom also means knowledge, because “knowing truth makes a person free. On the contrary, ignorance is bondage,” “slavery.” In relation to this view, he affirms that “Arab thinkers are doing their best [to] decline ignorance on behalf of freedom and self-emancipation.” Al-Yāzajī specifies what he holds to be “freedom” by affirming that it is “detachment or non-attachment. It is spirituality that transcends materialism,” the “emancipation of the Spirit from the bonds and restrictions of matter,” which is represented by the Cross. “In this context”—he adds—“Freedom is a progressive and endless movement.”

<sup>4</sup>For him “Christ was, and still is a sage, who preached man’s freedom and emancipation from the fetters of mere living.”



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## Dialectics and Freedom: The Interpretation of Hegel in Syria

**Abstract** This chapter deals with some general reflections about the main aspects of Hegel's contemporary reception in Syria and Lebanon, based on the information and elements presented in the previous chapters, and focuses on the central role of Marxism and on the peculiar situation of Syria.

**Keywords** Hegel · Reception · Arab world · Marx · Marxism  
Dialectics · Syria · Lebanon

Hegel's reception in this region of the Arab world generally shows a predominantly political character, especially in past years, and is strictly connected to the cultural centrality of Marxism. Hegel's philosophy has significantly entered the region, especially in association with Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s. A brief survey of the works translated and of the themes addressed by the secondary literature helps illustrate this phenomenon. The lack of a translation of the *Science of Logic* ([1812–1832] 2010) is remarkable, because only the “Small Logic” of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* was translated (Hegel 1985), and the translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was only completed in 2006, while previously, and significantly, the translation ended with the chapter on “Self-consciousness” (Hegel 1981a, b), which was the most interesting from a Marxist point of view because of the master-slave dialectic. If the logical-theoretical

and the moral-religious aspects of Hegel's thought do not seem to have attracted strong interest, attention to the philosophy of art is evidenced by the presence of important studies such as the one by the Egyptian 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī (1996) and the translation of *Aesthetics/Lectures on Fine Art* (Hegel 1978–1981). Interest in Hegel's works on religion, in particular in its logical-theological and anthropological-ethnological aspects, became strong enough only in very recent times to push the translation of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Hegel 2001–2004).<sup>1</sup> This not only shows the prevalence of a “political” approach, but it is also the result of other important factors: the fact that Hegel focuses on Christian religion and gives it preeminence, and his rationalistic viewpoint and approach. The historical-political aspect of Hegel's consideration of religion attracted more interest. In fact, although the complete *Early Theological Writings* were translated quite recently (Hegel 2003), the *Life of Jesus* was translated earlier (Hegel 1984) and in 2007 came to its third edition. Even the translated works *about* Hegel show a predominantly political interest and, in some cases, the fact that they have been translated suggests they have had the status of useful tools for general philosophical and political training. The authors of European essays are often involved in political activity, such as François Châtelet (1970) and Roger Garaudy ([1966] 1973) who were members of the French Communist Party, or are also Marx scholars such as Jean Hyppolite ([1948] 1969, 1981). Even among the translators there are some thinkers who are politically committed, such as Ilyās Murqus, who, according to Abdallah Laroui (1974, p. 134), considered himself a “*marxiste-léniniste*,” and George Saddiqnī, a prominent member of the Ba'ath party (whom I considered in Chapter 15).<sup>2</sup> At least up to the very recent past, Hegel used to be considered predominantly as the philosopher of freedom and law/state, much more tied to Marx than to the philosophy of Kant–Fichte–Schelling. The same view of Hegel's “idealism” seems more linked to the Marxian and then Marxist critique of Hegelian dialectics, than to the philosophy of German idealism. Thus, although

<sup>1</sup>As I will show, Hasan Hanafī was already interested in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1971 but has worked on Gibelin's French translation (Hegel [1832] 1954–1959).

<sup>2</sup>Murqus translated Garaudy ([1966] 1973) and Saddiqnī translated Châtelet (1970) and Hyppolite (1981). Also Michel Kīlū, the translator of Karl Löwith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (1988) is a well-known intellectual and human rights activist.

philosophical considerations of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling's thoughts are not absent, the theoretical-moral issues linked to Hegel's critique of "subjective" idealism does not seem to be one focus.<sup>3</sup>

Due mainly to dialectics and thus the association with the idea of freedom, from this point of view Hegel's name is linked to that of Marx, who is considered "superior" by Marxist thinkers (typified by the well-known assertion that until Marx, philosophy only "thought" about reality, instead of changing it). As also emphasized by Salāma (Chapter 14), even though Hegel is the dialectical thinker, he is also considered "idealist" in an abstract sense. Moreover, on the opposite side of the criticism of "idealism," Hegel can also be criticized as "materialist," especially by the religiously orientated. In relation to materialism the connection to Marx is far too easy, which in some cases seems to be the primary goal of critics. One may think for example of Muhammad Sa'īd Ramadān al-Būṭī, one of the most important thinkers of religious (Sunni) orientation in Syria until his recent death, who, in his book about *The Illusions of Dialectical Materialism* (n.d.) includes Hegel in his critique and his concept of contradiction. Another example of this kind of approach is the book *Our Philosophy* ([1979] 2000) by the Iraqi Shiite Muhammad Bāqir al-Sadr. In the Introduction (p. 1) he declares he wants to analyze (and criticize) the dialectics formulated by Hegel and Marx, since dialectic is the method on which modern materialism is based. In any case dialectics, for the political reasons mentioned above as well as its centrality to Marxist historical materialism, appears to be considered a philosophical method which religious thought (especially if interested in social and political issues) is driven to confront. Whether it is a desire for active "militancy" against Marxian dialectical thinking and hence the neutralization of its inspirer, or whether it is to respond to one of the most "powerful" representatives, philosophically speaking, of the Western world, Hegel is present as a subject of confrontation in theologically inspired thought, which is mainly animated by critical intent, apparently without any real interest in deepening knowledge of his vision of religion and the Absolute. The lack of a specific interest in Hegel's formulation of God, religion, and the absolute in general, can be also evinced by the late

<sup>3</sup>The lack of the term *Sollen* in Imām 'Abd al-Fattāh Imām's German-English-Arabic glossary (1984, pp. 386–405) is also indicative. The concept of *Sollen*, in fact, connects Hegel to his time and to the critique of the Kant-Fichtean moral theory and vision of the world.

translation of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and the final chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (dealing with religion) (Hegel 2001–2004, 2006). At the same time, the earlier translation of the *Life of Jesus* (Hegel 1984) can be indicative of a mainly historical-political interest, and probably interest in aspects that are somewhat in consonance with Muslim sensitivity, such as the consideration of Jesus as a prophet instead of the son of God, and the criticism of Christianity and Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

The hermeneutic approach, entailing the bond between Hegel and Marx, which is difficult to disentangle (as emphasized by Salāma and Barqāwī in Chapters 14 and 15), seems to be still vivid and present in Syria, more than in other countries. It is probably thanks to the link to dialectics and Marx, and to a dialectical reading of history, that Hegel's thought—although mainly his political thought—appears to remain vital and possessing some kind of “centrality,” as shown by the large availability of books both in the libraries and in the bookshops (unlike Beirut, where despite great availability of Hegel texts in the university libraries, in the most “up-to-date” bookshops—such as the “Antoine” chain—very few books by or on Hegel are available), as well as by studies about his thought. Maybe this is an indirect link in some cases. The internal political and philosophical debate, still linked to Marxism and Socialism on one side, and to historicism on the other, makes Hegel's view of man and history interesting, in spite of his ideas about the East; and his dialectics are still able to answer to the basic need of “liberation” of man (in the way Hegel meant, namely inside the state and according to laws and limitations/determinations). This also appears when considering the views of some authors of recent essays in Arabic about Hegel, such as Munā al-Naqshbandī, who first of all points out that Hegel is the Western thinker who marks the passage from the Middle Ages to the Modern Age and represents the watershed between two eras: that from Aristotle to Hegel himself, and the era after him. It is Hegel who taught the Germans how to think historically and the meaning of the “objective spirit” (see al-Naqshbandī 2000, p. 16). His philosophical position is “revolutionary” in a certain way, thanks both its break with the academic tradition and his interest in human freedom: “the most important problem that Hegel's thought was concerned with” (p. 52). In fact, since

<sup>4</sup>On the back cover of the book (Hegel 1984), the focus on ethics and the link with Kant are emphasized. It also mentions Hegel's criticism of the “hard” and legalist aspect of the Jewish religion.

his youth, he struggled for the liberation of man from the fetters of the Church and its laws, which served to subdue man in the name of God (see p. 52). The accents used by al-Naqshbandī reveal a certain aura of respect that surrounds Hegel, who is considered a libertarian philosopher even when, as in this case, his ideas are going to be criticized.

An example of the theoretical and “internal” approach to Hegel’s philosophy is given by Yūsuf Salāma. In his *The Concept of Negation in Hegel*, Salāma (2001) presents an analysis of how the concept of negation operates in the system of Hegel’s philosophy, particularly in the path of the *Phenomenology of Mind/Spirit* ([1807] 1931). Salāma, who is considered to be the greatest expert on Hegel in Syria (and one of the most important in the region), sees in the Hegelian concept of negation the possibility of resolving the problem of dualism which afflicts European consciousness. Because for Hegel history is one of the ingredients that contribute to the formation of philosophical concepts, he succeeds in overcoming the subjectivism that characterizes Western philosophy and in “transforming subjectivism into historical idealism” (Salāma 2001, p. 11). This means that for Hegelian idealism the ultimate truth is not the subject, but is discovered through practice and contact with the other (pp. 10–11). Therefore it appears that Salāma’s fundamental interest is political in the sense that it is about human action and the possibility of achieving freedom on one side and of realizing “the Good” on the other. The idea of human activity and the realization of the ideal returns in Salāma’s study on negation and utopia (Salāma 2008), where he focused on the dialectical movement. The center is negation not only from the logical-epistemological point of view, but also from the ontological point of view as the very essence of reality. It is the “utopia” to determine the movement of history, as its end, teleologically. In this way utopia and negation intertwine in the various phases of the historical movement. When a utopia is realized, negation loses its driving power and thus it comes to a new negation, moved by a new utopia.

The remarks of the scholars I have interviewed show that Hegel’s philosophy of history is well-known and mainly appreciated, and that the debate on Hegel’s “Orientalism” seems inactive, although there are critical reflections on Hegel’s description of the historical movement. The idea of “reason in history,” the mechanism behind the historical movement in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ([1840] 2001), as well as the role reserved for Arabs in World history, is critically addressed by Munā al-Naqshbandī, who starts from the reconstruction of Hegel’s

position on nationalism and religion, to introduce some criticism of Hegel's "mistakes." On one hand, al-Naqshbandī (2000, pp. 173–174) argues that there is a similarity between the mechanism underlying the historical movement in Hegel's view and theories belonging to Judaism. She holds that behind the view of the predominant role of the German people would be an idea similar to that of the Jewish "elect people," and the idea of the "end of history" would be similar to millenarian theory, of the "end of times." In addition, she holds (pp. 180–181) that Hegel's philosophy of history, with its movement that shows that every nation has historical significance only once, does not work with Arab history because Arabs have had several stages of historical dominance and protagonism (yet, she refers to the ancient populations of the area in general).

Hegel's thought was and still is prominent in the Syrian academic world, yet to what extent does it influence political life and society? The problem, today as yesterday, is that of the accessibility of the texts, so the translation work of the Egyptian scholar Imām 'Abd al-Fattāh Imām is highly appreciated. Although, of course, Hegel's philosophy is very complex and not easily accessible in any language, it is important to point out the difficulties of translating some terms and concepts into Arabic. An example is the term *Geist* (Spirit). In fact, the title of the *Phenomenology of Mind/Spirit*, has had different translations (see Hegel 1981a, b, 2006). Since 2006 *ruh* (Spirit) has prevailed, but there has also been *'aql* (intellect, reason), the word to which *Vernunft* (reason) is generally translated in the context of Hegelian thought. Also *fikr* (thought, idea) has been used. This is a clear and important example, but it is not the only one. What appear to be uncertainties and inconsistencies in translating some terms, or translators' inattentions to Hegel's specific language, are most often reflecting objective difficulties. They are sometimes due to passage through other languages, which in some cases present some variations in the terminology as well (in English, for example, both "Mind" and "Spirit" for *Geist*). However despite the translations, Hegel's philosophy remains accessible only to a narrow circle of intellectuals. Moreover, especially in Syria, as seen above, there still seems to be little interest in Hegel's philosophy taken for itself, disconnected from the link with Marx and Marxism. This is an uncomfortable connection, since it can lead to consideration of Hegel's thought as a positive liberating and revolutionary force, but it can also attract critical considerations, both for his idealism (from Marxism itself) and for his materialism (from theological-religious thought).

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## The Reception of Hegel in Egypt and the “Spirit of Time” (*Zeitgeist*)

**Abstract** This chapter addresses the relationship of some prominent Egyptian thinkers and intellectuals to the thought of Hegel, such as Hasan Hanafi and Imām ‘Abd al-Fattāh Imām, and outlines some features which seem to characterize Hegel’s reception in Egypt in general and to distinguish it from the one in Syria and Lebanon.

**Keywords** Hegel · Reception · Arab world · Orientalism  
Occidentalism · Egypt

Although this research focuses particularly on Syria and Lebanon, the peculiar cultural situation in the area requires Egypt’s situation to be taken into account, albeit briefly. I will proceed in broad lines, postponing to possible future research a deepening of the analysis of the Egyptian cultural situation.<sup>1</sup>

An “excellent” name among Egyptian thinkers is that of Hasan Hanafi, protagonist of the debate on “Orientalism” and “Occidentalism”

<sup>1</sup>On the reception of Hegel, especially by Egyptian authors, see ‘Atiya (2008) and Turki (2008).

with his *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism* (1991),<sup>2</sup> who also studied Hegel and criticized him. It should be noted that although he seems to know some of the works of the philosopher (from French translation) quite well, he falls into some inaccuracies. The first of the three essays on Hegel contained in his *Contemporary Western Thought* (1982) is devoted to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (see Hanafi [1971] 1982).<sup>3</sup> Here he focuses on exposing a few weak points of Hegel's discussion and thus comes to speak of Islam, or rather, of the absence of a discussion dedicated to Islam in the part about the "determinate"/"definite" religion. Before coming to the exposition and then critique, he argues as a premise that Hegel's philosophy is rightly considered one of the most beautiful that man has ever known. Hegel "is the one who divides European philosophy between modern and contemporary, is the peak achieved by European consciousness" (p. 155) and his philosophy, through Marx and the dialectics, has conquered the world. Hegel in this frame is not only the summit of European thought, but also of the representation that Europe has of itself and of its dominant role in history. Hanafi then moves to the exposition. When it comes to historical religions, he emphasizes Hegel's lack of treatment of Islam and provocatively affirms that "the most important things Hegel remembers about Islam are two: the abstract unity and fanaticism!" (p. 179). Hanafi essentially recollects Hegel's statements, including accurate references to the pages of Gibelin's translation in the text (Hegel [1832] 1954–1959), and lets his own opinion shine through, by using exclamation points and brief digressions.

In Hanafi's interpretation of Hegel, Islam would be a religion that is liable to become widespread among peoples because of the simplicity of its faith and because it is the religion of the unity of being, as in Rūmī. He insists on the "distorted" view of Islam that Hegel would take from mysticism and compares Muslim mysticism (Sufism) to Christianity,

<sup>2</sup>At the base of "Orientalism" there is a subject–object relationship in which the Orientals and the Orient are objects of study and are not subjects. Hanafi's idea is to invert this relationship and produce a vision of history and of the West that is functional to its own position.

<sup>3</sup>The other essays are: "Hegel and the Contemporary Thought" ([1970] 1982a) and "Hegel and our Contemporary Life" ([1970] 1982b).

pointing out that Islam is strictly centered on the distance between man and God, on the absolute transcendence of God. For him, Hegel, influenced by Sufism, did not understand the true nature of Islam, because he considered Islam a religion of necessity, instead of freedom: "the religion of unity without freedom, and on the contrary Christianity is a religion of the Trinity and freedom!" (p. 180). In addition, according to Hanafi, Hegel considered Islam a religion that aims at the conquest of the world, like the Roman Empire. In this regard, however, it should be noted that Hegel distinguishes between the two types of conquest: material and spiritual, and emphasizes that Islam—like Christianity—thinks of spiritual conquest (see Hegel [1832] 1895, II, pp. 296–297).

Even the pages devoted by Hanafi ([1970] 1982b, p. 233 ff.) to the role of Islam in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* ([1840] 2001) are basically an exposition of Hegel's positions with some critical considerations; in these pages Hanafi points out that Hegel's view is the one spread by the colonialist West of the nineteenth century. So, he remarks that Hegel sees the West as the heir to the culture of the Oriental, Greek, and Roman civilizations, and the culmination of history, which ends in the Germanic empire. Hanafi also argues that the fact that Hegel classifies peoples on the basis of climatic geography, which determines their temperament, shows that he is "prey to the racial theories that prevailed in the nineteenth century" (p. 237). At the conclusion of the last of the three essays dedicated to Hegel, Hanafi returns to discussing "European consciousness" and outlines a program for intellectuals in the Third World based on the rewriting of history with unbiased sentiment and the building of a new conscience, by going through the description of the development of European conscience, which is in crisis and should be replaced in the role of primacy that has characterized it in the last five centuries (pp. 237–238). This is the program of "Occidentalism." What is interesting is that it is proposed at the end of a critical exposition of Hegel's philosophy. This means that Hegel is seen as the peak of the movement of Europe's elevation over the rest of the world, which is not only a conquest and a political occupation, but also the production of a hegemonic discourse.

From this point of view, Hanafi appears to be in consonance with the debate on colonialism and "Orientalism," of which he is one of the protagonists. He considers Hegel the philosopher of modernity—contemporaneity and in reference to the Hegelian system he proposes his alternative to "Orientalism" as a distorted view of the East by the West.

However, probably because of his critical-polemical intent, he tends to confuse and combine Hegel's position on the East with that on the Arab and Islamic worlds. In addition, he himself seems to participate in the categories he intends to criticize. He is aware of this risk and states as a premise that he does not want to propose an ethnocentric operation:

It is not about making of the East the culmination of civilization if we are Oriental, or of Islam the last stage of the development of religions, because we are Muslims, or to make the Arab nation the result of all previous peoples because we are Arabs or to make Egypt the end of world civilizations and their fulfillment as Egyptians. (Hanafi [1970] 1982b, p. 233)

Despite this assertion, however, as some of his critics point out (see Wahyudi 2003), Hanafi does not seem completely free from the mechanisms of "Orientalism," because—as with Orientalism—his argumentation is based on oppositions and abstractions. In this way, in his reconstruction the "I"—Arab or Oriental in general—ends up lacking in complexity and historicity, as does the European "other." This, as I have tried to show, is also reflected in his analysis of Hegel's position on Islam, which, although in some aspects deep and attentive from the philological point of view, is fundamentally reductive. His reading appears to be at least partly oriented to a view that frames Hegel's positions in what is considered the fundamental trend of the nineteenth century, which can be seen, with Maxime Rodinson (2002, p. 65), as "conscious eurocentrism."

Another important figure is that of the already mentioned Imām 'Abd al-Fattāh Imām, the indisputable protagonist of the translation movement, as well as an esteemed interpreter of Hegel's thought. As it is also underlined by Turki (2008, p. 185), the translations are his great merit, as he was the first "to have put in motion a continuous and systematic reception of Hegel" through the series "Hegel Library" (*al-maktaba al-hegeliya*), which has published Hegel's books and significant studies on the work of the philosopher, with translation conducted on the English texts. Imām also represents a current among Hegel's reception in Arabic, which can be seen as "Aristotelian" (p. 184)<sup>4</sup> because in his approach to Hegel it refers to categories and patterns derived from the approach of Aristotelian and formal logic.

<sup>4</sup>The translation from German is mine.

Imām also addresses Hegel’s view of the East (which tends to identify with that of the Arab world). In Imām’s *Introduction* to the translation of the second part of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel 1984), dedicated to the Oriental world, a very interesting statement is to be found:

The East is our world and it is very interesting for us. Here we find an analysis of the Oriental personality, whose negative features unfortunately come to this day [...] We are in front of this profound analysis of the “Oriental Spirit,” on the one hand as in front of a mirror that enlarges, reflecting our personality with all its beautiful and ugly qualities. In this way, the reader has the opportunity to compare what Hegel says about the characteristics and peculiarities of the Eastern world from the point of view of ethics, politics, art, religion and the various phenomena of life, with what he himself sees in these different fields. On the other hand, to reach this stage of self-consciousness is very important for us because it represents a rigorous epistemological position that allows us to become awake to evaluate all this, correct it and then build, so that we can catch up civilization. (Imām 1984, p. 14; see also Turki 2008, p. 192)

Imām thinks of becoming awake and aware, which entails the measuring of the distance of Arab/Oriental characteristics and viewpoints from those which represent “civilization.” He seems to speak about non-European peoples in general as “Oriental” in a broad sense, meaning by it the opposite of the term “Western” (similar to the “Orientalist” position). In this context however, his intent being clearly broader than the consideration of Hegel’s views, he neglects the fact that Hegel emphasizes the difference between the Oriental and Islamic worlds. Imām seems to play on the identification between the East and the Arab-Islamic world to use Hegel’s statements as an exhortation to the Arabs. Whilst Hanafi seems to propose this comparison with a critical purpose toward Hegel and Eurocentric thought, Imām focuses on the future and the possibility for the Arab/Oriental to overcome the current situation and move toward “real” progress.

A prominent Egyptian scholar, who successfully dealt with Hegel, is ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, who wrote about Hegel’s *Aesthetics* (1996a) and political philosophy (1996b). He was an important and internationally renowned thinker, belonging to the Heideggerian existentialist current, and provides a further example of interpretations filtered by different philosophical positions. The fact that Hegel’s reception came through expertise of other authors and philosophical positions leads to

Hegel's image changing and assuming different contours from time to time.<sup>5</sup> The presence of interpretations influenced by other philosophical currents, despite the fact that research and confrontation with Hegel's thought are very active in Egypt, shows that it is not appropriate to speak—as Ghālī (2000, pp. 6–7)<sup>6</sup> does—of a proper Hegelian “school.”

Similarly, one cannot properly speak of “Arab” or “Islamic Hegelianism,” as suggested in the paragraph “Islamic Hegelianism?” of the *History of Islamic Philosophy* (Nasr and Leaman 2001), by Ibrahim Abu Rabi' (2001), who presents some philosophical positions held by Arab thinkers (referring in particular to Hasan Hanafi, Hichem Djait, and Hisham Sharabi) as developments of Hegelian thought. As regards Hasan Hanafi, in fact, it seems more correct to speak of an Islamic or Arab “Hegelian Left,” as in the case of Hanafi's critique of theology, to which—as abstract and distant from man—he opposes anthropology (pp. 1102–1103). This idea has an affinity with Feuerbach's and the critique that he applies to Hegel's thought—that it is detached from the finite and the sensible. Tunisian historian Hichem Djait (who studied in France and writes in French) and Palestinian Hisham Sharabi (who lived in the United States for a long time and wrote in English) can be considered extraneous to the areas covered by the present research and, above all, very influenced by Western environments and so not suitable to be a measure of the reception of Hegel's thought in the Arab world. On the other hand, they testify of a more general influence of Hegelian ideas and categories in the broader sense, in the Arab world and beyond.

In this brief consideration of Hegel's reception in Egypt, I have focused on authors who represent particularly significant positions from the viewpoint of the self-representation of the Arabs, their role in history, and their dialogue with the West. Hegelian categories are known and used, but, unlike what happens in Syria, the reception of Hegel's thought seems to reflect the tendencies of Western debate and above all reflects what is felt as a primary demand of Arab culture, namely to answer the question about their identity and role, also through the better determination of what is “alien” to it (for example the heritage of

<sup>5</sup> See 'Atiya (2008, 219–257), see also Turki (2008, 184–191). Among the authors mentioned are Aristotle, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and Kojève, in addition to Marx.

<sup>6</sup> Ghālī speaks of a Hegelian “school” in Egypt, referring in particular to the “greats,” who first carried out Hegel's reading according to the guidelines of Marxism, and whose work—even if it is to be revised—remains fundamental to contemporary studies in Egypt.

colonialism). It is a role not so much in history taken for itself, but in history read through the category of "modernity," with respect to which Hegel is seen as the privileged interlocutor. This emerges above all in Imām's positions; while a more complex relationship with Hegel, on one hand criticized, and on the other taken as a model (albeit modified), is represented by Hanafi's stance.

As seen above, in the Syrian and partly in the Lebanese cultural context, Hegel's philosophy assumes a different meaning. In Lebanon many aspects of the present global philosophical debate are present and much information is available, but the marginalization of Marxism (and historicism) seems to have had an effect on Hegel's reception, which if not at least partly marginalized, develops in several different directions (in the case of Ma'ālūf concentrating on the dialogue between "differences," in particular in relation to Hegel's idea of "recognition"). In Syria, Hegel's categories are considered with attention to their revolutionary and critical potential. Hegel's philosophy of history—and historicism in general—is not rejected, but is still considered a valid approach to history, reflecting a political context which is still largely influenced by Marxist and socialist views. In this sense, the situation in Syria is very peculiar, because it appears to be more linked to internal debate and dynamics and less to international ones. Syrian cultural context does not seem to be so receptive to the echoes of the debate related to the reflection on (post)colonialism and "Orientalism," at least not enough to develop a critical relation to Hegel's thought on this aspect. He remains a philosopher with a liberating power. Hegel's writings on Islam, Arab philosophy, and the Orient, though known and in some cases criticized, have not played a central role in the relationship to his thought, and he does not seem to have assumed the role of representative, positive or negative, of the thought of the modern West about the East and the Arab and Islamic worlds.

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